

What we VALUE - CHRIST CENTRED

John 15:1-8, Col 1:15-20, Is 53:3-6

6 February 2022

Today we begin a new series on the Values in our Vision 26. We have four values Christ-centred, Bible-based, Spirit-led, Mission-shaped.

The value we are looking at today – Christ-centred. But I am going to dip into Bible-based as well because it is hard to talk about Jesus without talking about the Bible. And we will look at how we interpret the Bible to get the best possible understanding of Jesus.

One question some of you may have on your mind is why do we have to state that we are Christ-centred; surely that is obvious. Surely all churches who call themselves Christian have a focus on Jesus Christ, so how does this say anything distinctive about us?

If that is your question let me give you some findings from a little research I have done this week. I looked up the websites of at least a dozen churches, some of them were Anglican churches in Brisbane Diocese and some were other denominations. It is surprising to find there are many churches which say little or nothing about Jesus on their websites. The impression I got from a lot of these websites was that the message of the church was the church itself. The message seemed to be we have all of these wonderful activities happening which we enjoy so why not come and join us and you can enjoy them too. The message was the church is a great place to be, so come and try us out.

There were other churches where the message was about spirituality. They talked about the style of spirituality that they promoted, obviously to contrast it with other spiritualities so that people could see what made them distinctive. But once again there was little or no mention of Jesus Christ. Maybe it was assumed that he would be at the heart of the spirituality and for some I'm sure he is. Or it may be they were deliberately downplaying Jesus because they prefer to simply talk about God and be open to a wider range of ideas than just the teaching of Jesus.

So from this I hope you will see that just because a church says it is a Christian Church, it doesn't necessarily mean it is Christ-centred.

What we want to say to the world is that a distinctive of Noosa Anglican is that we are Christ-centred. Our vision is that we are living to love and proclaim Jesus.

Our message is very clear,

- we are not just promoting God in general terms,
- we are not promoting spirituality per se, or just trying to make people more spiritual.
- We are not saying the church and its activities are the message. We certainly hope the church activities are attractive and back up the message, but the essence of the message is outside ourselves, it is found in the person of Jesus Christ. So we want to promote our value of being Christ-centred.

The next question to ask is who is the Jesus Christ we are centred on? Once again the answer may seem obvious, the Jesus we find in the Bible,

Is there any other Jesus?

Well yes, in fact there is.

There is the Jesus of the Bible plus tradition. This is the Catholic understanding of Christianity which believes God has given the church authority to develop doctrines which go beyond what we find in

the Bible. So the Jesus of the church with all its traditions is the Jesus people follow. I love my brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church so as far as the traditions have a good biblical grounding I would say Amen, go for it, but where they vary I respectfully take a different path. We believe the Bible alone is sufficient.

Another Jesus which is out there is the Jesus of the Bible plus reason. This is the liberal understanding of Christianity which believes that modern reason means we have to do what the scholars call, deconstruct the New Testament and then put it back together again in a way that is consistent with the contemporary reasoning. A simple example is the reasoning that miracles can't happen, so all of Jesus' miracles are given natural explanations. So the Jesus of reason, which fits with the philosophical framework of the day, is the Jesus to follow.

When we talk about being Christ-centred in Vision 26, we are talking about the Biblical Jesus. We believe that what has been recorded in the Bible by the Apostles and close associates of the Apostles is the most accurate and through account of Jesus which is possible and we don't need to go beyond it. This is the standard we must always come back to to discover the real Jesus.

This doesn't mean we are oblivious to tradition and reason. No one can interpret the Bible without tradition and reason.

- It is the tradition of the church in the first five centuries which gives us the well defined doctrine of the Trinity.

- In the Middle Ages the Church discovers it has a place in society and the Bible has to be interpreted in terms of what it says to society at large.

- It is the church in the Reformation which clearly defines the great doctrine of justification by faith.

- In the 18th Century and onwards the evangelical revival's in England and America and the modern missionary movement, have fine tuned our understanding of the Bible's call to mission.

We cannot escape tradition and it shapes our reading of the Bible I'm sure more than we are aware. But whatever traditions we have inherited we always take them back to the Jesus of the scriptures and interpret them afresh for each new era.

And of course we are also going to use reason in the way we interpret the Bible. The only way you can put together a creed or a systematic theology is through careful reason.

Every time you sit down in your Connect Group you are using reasoned discussion to come to a full understanding of the passage and what it means. You will be using reason to work out the application of the text for our world today and specifically for what it means for you in your life. This all requires the careful use of reason.

What is important is that our reasoning sits under the authority of scripture and not the other way round. We have to read the teaching of Jesus with humble hearts that are ready to obey.

So it is the Biblical Jesus with a healthy understanding of tradition and reason which shapes our faith.

So who is this Biblical Jesus? Today we are going to dip into three passages of scripture which teach us three very important things about Jesus.

Firstly, Colossians Chapter 1

The first thing we learn in this passage

v15 *"the Son is the image of the invisible God."*

And in v19 *"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him."*

God is invisible. So most people think the best we can do is make guesses at what God is like and what happens after death. All the great religions of the world are seen as human beings trying to work out what God is like and what happens after death. Some people interpret the Bible in the same way – it is stories about human beings grasping after God.

But the Bible itself claims to be a written word from God pointing us to the living word of God - Jesus. On the Mount of Transfiguration the voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

God has revealed himself, and Jesus is that revelation.

There is the story of the Sunday School teacher who asked the young girl what she was drawing? The girl replied, "A picture of Jesus." "But no one knows what Jesus looked like," the teacher said. "Well they will when I've finished."

The Apostle Paul says He is the image of the invisible God. Someone has described Jesus as the human photograph of God. We now know what God is like, we get a clear picture through Jesus of Nazareth and all that we read about him in the New Testament.

So in Jesus God has come in the flesh, what we call the Incarnation.
We are without excuse. We do not have to live in a fog about God.
Jesus is the image of the invisible God. This is the message of Colossians.

The second thing comes from our Isaiah reading.
Jesus is God come in the flesh, yes, but why?
Isaiah 53.5 tells us -

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

This is of course talking about the cross. Jesus on many occasions taught his disciples that the goal of his mission on earth was to go to the cross. And that this would be the one, full, complete and sufficient sacrifice for sin that would fulfil the Old Testament sacrificial system and do away with the Temple and its continual sacrifices.

The reason Jesus came to this earth was to make a way for our sins to be forgiven so that we could be reconciled with a holy God. *"His punishment has brought us peace, by his wounds we are healed."*

If you don't remember anything else about Jesus at least remember these two things,
Who is Jesus? He is God Incarnate, the image of the invisible God.
What did Jesus come to do? He came to go to the cross to be pierced for our transgressions so that we might be healed.

It is good to know these great truths about Jesus, but Jesus himself said this wasn't enough. Jesus called people to follow him. He bid them to come die with him, and rise with him to a new life. This is where our gospel reading from John comes in. The image for believing in Jesus and following him in John 15 is being attached to the vine. Jesus says, *"I am the vine you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

What a wonderful illustration of our total dependence on Christ! We receive all our sustenance from the vine and apart from him we can do nothing, ie. nothing of lasting value for the Kingdom. We have to remain in the vine.

Jesus says that every branch that bears fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. I'm no gardener so I consulted Professor Google to learn more about pruning. This is what he said, *"Pruning removes dead and dying branches and stubs, allowing room for new growth. It also deters pest and animal infestation and promotes the plant's natural shape and healthy growth."* Well I think that explains the image beautifully.

I know pruning hurts at the time, cutting the bad stuff out of our lives; but ultimately it helps with more growth. It allows us to be even more fruitful.

I think when Jesus said to take up our cross and follow him he had in mind the idea of crucifying self which is about pruning the deadwood, allowing for new growth. In practical terms it means dying to self so that we might see more clearly the needs of others, and enter into fruitful ministry.

Being Christ centred is about being attached to him so that he might do his ministry through you and give you a fruitful life of discipleship.

Faith is about believing certain doctrines about Jesus but it is also following him.

I think Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it very well when he says,

"When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate people from all man made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience. If they follow Jesus people escape from the hard yoke of their own laws, and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ. But does this mean that we ignore the seriousness of his commands? Far from it. We can only achieve perfect liberty and enjoy fellowship with Jesus when his command, his call to absolute discipleship, is appreciated in its entirety. Only the one who follows the command of Jesus single-mindedly, and unresistingly let's his yoke rest upon him, finds his burden easy, and under its gentle pressure receives the power to persevere in the right way."

The idea of the easy yoke and light burden fits well, I think, with the idea of abiding in the vine. Only if we are attached to the vine and receiving our sustenance from Jesus will the burden be light. This is the only way to do discipleship.

So my friends I would hope you might see this morning that being Christ-centred does make us distinctive as a church.

Being Christ-centred means believing in the Jesus of the Bible.

-The Jesus of Colossians 1 *"He is the image of the invisible God."*

-The Jesus of Isaiah 53 *"He was crushed for our iniquities ...and by his wounds we are healed."*

-And the Jesus of John 15 and the call to discipleship and being fruitful.

It all happens only as we
remain in the vine and
draw all of our sustenance from him to his glory Amen.