

**DIOCESE OF  
CHICHESTER**  
TO KNOW · LOVE · FOLLOW JESUS



YEAR OF THE BIBLE 2017

## **Hear the Word of the Lord**

**A Lent course for the Diocese of Chichester's  
Year of the Bible**

## **Session 5 – The Gospels**

**written by James Dunn and Lisa Barnett  
and edited by Rebecca Swyer**

## Session introduction (5 minutes)

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*This is the last-but-one session of this course. Participants are encouraged to continue their studies next term or in the autumn, and to think about whether your local church may want to adopt one of the courses recommended at [www.chichester.anglican.org/bible](http://www.chichester.anglican.org/bible)*

## Suggested opening prayers (10 minutes)

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*Prayers and psalms can either be said 'responsorially' (i.e. a leader leads and others respond), or 'antiphonally' (i.e. two groups of voices, each saying alternate verses). One way of splitting a group is by birth month – Jan-Jun and Jul-Dec. Music / hymn / song suggestions are made, but whether or not to include them, accompanied or not, and at which stage, is entirely up to you.*

O Lord, open thou our lips.

**And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

O God, make speed to save us.

**O Lord, make haste to help us.**

*Psalm 27 (this translation is from the Common Worship psalter):*

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?

**The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?**

When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh,  
**they stumbled and fell.**

Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not be afraid,  
**and though there rise up war against me, yet will I put my trust in him.**

One thing have I asked of the Lord and that alone I seek;  
**that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,**

To behold the fair beauty of the Lord  
**and to seek his will in his temple.**

For in the day of trouble he shall hide me in his shelter;  
**in the secret place of his dwelling shall he hide me and set me high upon a rock.**

And now shall he lift up my head  
**above my enemies round about me;**

Therefore will I offer in his dwelling an oblation with great gladness;  
**I will sing and make music to the Lord.**

Hear my voice, O Lord, when I call;  
**have mercy upon me and answer me.**

My heart tells of your word, 'Seek my face.'  
**Your face, Lord, will I seek.**

Hide not your face from me,  
**nor cast your servant away in displeasure.**

You have been my helper;  
**leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.**

Though my father and my mother forsake me,  
**the Lord will take me up.**

Teach me your way, O Lord;  
**lead me on a level path, because of those who lie in wait for me.**

Deliver me not into the will of my adversaries,  
**for false witnesses have risen up against me, and those who breathe out violence.**

16I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
**in the land of the living.**

Wait for the Lord; be strong and he shall comfort your heart;  
**wait patiently for the Lord.**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
 as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

*Hymn/song suggestion: Be Thou my vision*

*A Prayer*

**Faithful God, thank you for your presence with us.  
 Thank you for one another, and this period of lent in which to draw closer to you.  
 Open our eyes to see you, our ears to hear from you, and our hearts to welcome you  
 in Jesus' name. Amen**

### **Professor Dunn's introduction (10 minutes)**

The gap between Jesus' ministry and the first of our written Gospels is about 40 years. But we can be sure that stories about Jesus and memories of his teaching were circulating from the beginning of the Jesus movement. It is clear, for example, that Mark has been able to draw into his Gospel the memory of a few days in Jesus' ministry (Mark 2.1-3.6). Likewise with a collection of Jesus' parables (4.1-34) and a sequence of his miracles (4.35-5.43, 6.30-56). And Matthew and Luke were clearly drawing on (a) collection(s) of Jesus' teaching, usually referred to as the Q (Quelle) source.

In the first century the word 'gospel' (good news) seems to have been mainly used in the plural in regard to the exploits of the Emperor. It was Paul who took it over and made the singular use his own in referring to the good news, that is, of Jesus Christ. 60 out of the 76 NT occurrences of the word appear in the Pauline letters. Paul used it principally in reference to Jesus' death and resurrection. Mark took it over and by using it to refer to the story he was about to tell (Mark 1.1) he ensured that for Christians thereafter 'the Gospel' was a reference primarily to Jesus' ministry, climaxing in his death and resurrection.

**Mark** is usually regarded as the first Gospel, possibly written in Rome, or perhaps more likely in Syria, and probably written not long before or after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. An early tradition refers to Mark as Peter's interpreter, which ties in with 1 Pet. 5.13, but beyond that is uncertainty. A personal link to Mark 14.51-52 is an intriguing possibility. A prominent feature is the steady unveiling of Jesus' identity as Messiah, first announced by demoniacs (e.g. 1.24, 34), confessed but misunderstood by Peter (8.29-33), admitted by Jesus (14.62), and finally proclaimed by the centurion (of all people!) at the cross (15.39).

That **Matthew** is given first place probably reflects the fact that it is attributed to one of Jesus' closest disciples and, as such, was the Gospel most used in the 2nd century. Are Matt. 10.3 and 13.52 self-references? The likely allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in 22.7 puts the date sometime after 70. Notable is the Jewish character of Matthew's Gospel: Jesus' teaching is grouped in five blocks, probably reflecting the five books of Moses (notably 5-7); that Jesus was the 'son of David' is emphasized (e.g. 15.22; 21.9, 15), as also the fact that he fulfilled various scriptures (e.g. 1.22-23; 2.15, 23). Jousting with Pharisees over the law (e.g. 5.17-20) reflects the post 70 period too.

Luke is the only obviously Gentile author of a Gospel, the first part of a two-volume history of Christianity's beginnings (**Luke-Acts**). His identity as a close collaborator of Paul is clear from the 'we' passages in Acts (from Acts 16.10 onwards). Like Matthew, Luke begins with a birth-narrative. Characteristic is the emphasis he places on Jesus' empowerment by the Holy Spirit (e.g. Luke 4.1, 14, 18) and on the gift of the Spirit subsequently (Acts 1.8; 2.4, 38; 10.43-38 and 11. 14-18; 19.1-6). And not least that the gospel is for Gentiles too (e.g. Luke 3.4-6; 4.25-27; 13.28-29; Acts 3.25; 10.28; 15.17).

**John** is quite different from the other NT Gospels – not so much a historical narrative, as a reflection on the significance of what Jesus said and did as God's word and wisdom. The purpose is clearly explained in John 20.30-31. The main strategy was to link accounts of Jesus' miracles (or 'signs') with lengthy discourses on their significance – e.g. 5.1-9 followed by 5.10-47, and 9.1-7 followed by 9.8-41. Notable are the lengthy discourses particularly 14-16, whose purpose is presumably given in 14.26. Notable also and unique to John are the striking 'I am' assertions of Jesus which sum up his significance for John – e.g. 6.35, 48; 8.12; 11.25; 14.6.

*About the author of this reflection:*

*James D. G. "Jimmy" Dunn FBA was for many years the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham. He is now retired and lives in Chichester.*

**Group discussion (15 minutes)**

1. Why is John’s Gospel so different from the others?
2. Which is your favourite Gospel and why?

**Bible passage (5 minutes)**

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

*John 1:35-51*

*You may wish to try your own Ignatian meditation on a Gospel story this week, and the following guidelines could be a starting point.*

- *Read the text slowly and carefully; recall what it is about; then let it come alive for you!*
- *Place yourself inside the story, using your imagination; become one of the characters in the scene.*
- *Participate in the dynamics of the scene, dialoguing & interacting with Jesus and the other characters.*
- *Observe what is going on around you in the scene: What do you see, hear, feel, smell, taste, touch?*
- *Dialogue with the other characters: What do they say or ask you? What do you say or ask them in reply?*
- *Notice what is going on inside you as you pray: joy, sorrow, peace, confusion, love, anger, etc.*
- *If you get distracted or your mind wanders, gently return to the biblical text and re-enter the scene.*
- *Conclude with a short personal conversation with Jesus (or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit); speak heart-to-heart, as if conversing with a close friend.*
- *Afterwards, briefly review what you experienced during this time of prayer (maybe journal about what happened), and look forward to your next prayerful encounter with God (when? where? which biblical text will you use?).*
- *Ignatius also places a lot of emphasis on repetition, and therefore the possibility of returning to the same scene again, and exploring it more with God. If something has been particularly surprising, or difficult, or confusing, it’s worth returning to the passage again within your next prayer time, and asking God to show you more of what it means.*

**Lisa Barnett’s reflection (10 minutes)**

I think I was 14 when I first read through a Gospel in one sitting. It was set as ‘homework’ from our confirmation class, and we were advised to read Mark’s Gospel, because it is the shortest. I still remember the impact it had on me; the way I was caught up in the events of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and it all became real in a new and deeper way.

I still love reading stories from the Gospels, because they’re full of real people having real conversations with Jesus and being transformed through them.

In John 1, we see several people meeting Jesus, and having quite normal conversations with him, which end up changing their lives. John's disciples, when put on the spot, ask Jesus the rather inane question of where he's staying, and end up spending the rest of the day with him. One of them then gets his brother, Simon, and Jesus surprises them all by giving him a new name. The following day, Jesus finds Philip, and calls him to follow, which he does. Philip then finds Nathanael, who is initially dubious about Jesus, but then discovers that Jesus already knows him, and becomes convinced.

*About the author of this reflection:*

*The Revd. Lisa Barnett is the Vicar of Scaynes Hill, near Haywards Heath. She is also an assistant diocesan director of ordinands.*

It all happens in just a few verses, and there's something very normal about the conversations that play out between Jesus and each of these men. They don't involve miracles, nothing spectacular happens, but in the conversations with Jesus, each of their lives is changed forever.

I've found that the wisdom of St Ignatius of Loyola has helped me to use Gospel stories to have my own honest conversations with Jesus in prayer. St Ignatius invites us to prayerfully imagine ourselves in different scenes from the Gospels, becoming aware of the sights and sounds and smells of life in 1st Century Palestine, and letting people's conversations with Jesus in the Gospels become our conversations with Him too. As we speak to Jesus 'face to face' about the things of our lives, we may find ourselves moved to respond, just as Simon, Nathanael & Philip did.

We might imagine that we are Zacchaeus, climbing a tree so that we can see Jesus and then hearing Jesus asking if he could come to our house for supper, and marvelling that Jesus noticed us.

In turbulent times, we might imagine that we are with the disciples in a boat when a storm comes up, and hear Jesus saying to the storm, 'Quiet, be still!' and we might pray that Jesus would bring peace in the storms that we face in our own lives.

We might imagine Jesus telling his disciples that those who follow him must deny themselves, and take up their cross, and be led to respond by confessing to Jesus that we don't find that easy to do, and asking Him to help us.

When we find Jesus' words strange and confusing we can be reassured as we notice that the Disciples found Jesus puzzling too, and we can bring our questions to Jesus, just like they did.

In times of grief, we might imagine Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, and see his concern for Mary & Martha, and notice that Jesus wept too, and be reminded that God cares. We might hear Jesus' words, 'I am the way and the truth and the life' and take time once again to receive Jesus' promise of eternal life for ourselves.

Each part of the Bible is precious and offers us different perspectives and insights. But the Gospels are a particular gift to us, as we seek to see Jesus more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow him more nearly.

### **Group discussion (20 minutes)**

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1. Have you ever read a Gospel all in one go? Could your group take on the challenge of doing it this week?
2. Are you able to have 'normal' conversations with Jesus in prayer? What helps you? What gets in the way?
3. Have you ever tried prayerfully imagining yourself in the scene of a Gospel story? Does it appeal to you / intrigue you / scare you?

## Concluding prayer/worship (10 minutes)

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*Hymn/song suggestion: Will you come and follow me (or alternatively read aloud by one or more members of the group)*

*As a group, offer prayers of intercession for the church and for the world. In preparing to do this, participants are encouraged to reflect in silence, and then (if they choose) offer their prayer aloud, each time ending with:*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

*The prayers of intercession may be concluded as follows:*

Merciful Father

**Accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*The Prayer of Saint Richard of Chichester*

**Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ  
For all the benefits Thou hast given me,  
For all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me.**

**O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,  
May I know Thee more clearly,  
Love Thee more dearly,  
Follow Thee more nearly.**

**Amen.**

*The grace*

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.  
Amen.**

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