

Paving the Way – Life Group notes

Bible verse – Luke 3 v 1-18:

John the Baptist is intriguing. When we read about him in the bible, he seems so different, so outspoken, so wild, so sure (most of the time). So unconventional and yet he drew so many to him and his message. They didn't just listen, but they responded. He was popular and successful. And he paved the way for Christ. John was the first great witness, and we are called to be like him, to make the challenge of faith, that will shine out and give hope to others. As we prepare for all that Christmas will bring, and the frontline opportunities we will have, what can we learn from John about how to do this.

- 1) In the harshness of the wild came the clear voice of God to John (Luke 3 v 2). Even in the wilderness God can and does speak to us. If God can share a message that important to John in the wilderness – what message can he give us, if we are willing to go there too?
- 2) Once he knew his calling, he went into action (Luke 3 v 3). John's example to us is to be an influencer to the people around us. We have the good news to share with people about repentance and the new life that is possible with Jesus. And if that sounds scary remember the quote 'Preach the Gospel. Use words if necessary' (St Francis of Assisi). It is often about how we live our lives as much as what we say that has the biggest impact for others.
- 3) John called it as it is (Luke 3, v 7 – 9). At first when he calls the crowds a 'brood of vipers' it seems he is chastising them. His delivery is blunt, but he is warning them of what is coming so they can prepare themselves and repent. When asked by the crowd about how to act he brings it back to hospitality and generosity. John knew that kindness, gentleness, and a focus on others rather than self would show people something different to the norm.
- 4) John spoke truth to power (Luke 3, v 12 – 14) He challenges the exploitation of others. We too can point out the things that people do which affects others but in a helpful way. We can think about what it means to be content and to not use our power to exploit others.
- 5) John knew who he was (Luke 3, v 15 – 18). He knew he was a messenger and not the Messiah. We need to make sure that we are reflecting Jesus and not our own agenda. John was aware that it was God who would do the work – not us. All we have to do is take away the barriers.
- 6) Jesus working in others might not look like we expect (Luke 7 v 18). After all of John's certainty suddenly he has some doubts. Jesus' actions didn't look like the all-conquering hero the Jews expected – instead he fed people, healed them and cared for them. We need to make sure we don't have a fixed idea about how God works and we need to be careful not to get in the way of what God is doing. We need to be open, adaptable and trust God's perfect plan. It might be that we learn something ourselves along the way.

One thing we know which John didn't is the whole truth about the Gospel. John can show us how to recognise Jesus but because of the cross we can get to know Jesus better and grow and learn with him. Which means we will more easily recognise what he is doing in others' lives so we can support them. Let's be confident that we can learn from John and trust that Jesus gives us all that we need through his grace to pave the way for others.

Questions

- 1) John the Baptist hears God in the wilderness. Have you ever had a wilderness experience? How did you hear God's voice during that time?
- 2) How could you be an influencer for God? In what ways have others influenced or challenged you? What approach did they use?
- 3) Have you ever spoke truth to power? What happened?
- 4) What unexpected things have you see God do in others' lives? What did it teach you about Jesus?