

Living it out (Application):

Last week's question: How have you loved God this week?

Do you naturally pray most easily to the Father, the Son or the Spirit? Why?

Coming Up at St Mark's

If you would be interested in joining/helping or leading on the next **Alpha Course** in the spring, please see Andy Patrick.

If you would like to join our team of **"Snow Angels"** available for clearing snow from the paths of vulnerable people, please see Terry Wilcox, or Christine Hornby.

Marksman Curry and Quiz – Thursday 31st January 2013 at Wetherspoons.
Food at 7:30pm, quiz at 8:30pm

**CURRY
AND
QUIZ
NIGHT**



Please pray for...

Give thanks for the life of **Val Sayles**, and pray for Bob and the family. We thank you Father for a precious sister in Christ, for her perseverance, and that she sees you face to face.

Pray for **Alexander Chester**, born last week to Tim and Jenny, and undergoing radical heart surgery.

Continue to pray for **Monique Teo**, moving to India after many months to work with children involved in temple prostitution. Please pray for protection for Monique, and strength for the task.

Continue to pray for **Andrea, Di** and others in need of healing and strength at the moment.

Pray for the local families you know who are grieving loved ones killed last week in the avalanche on Glencoe.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Please pray for the work of **CURE International, Malawi Blantyre Orthopaedic hospital**, training surgeons for eastern Africa

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 27th January 2013

Worship/reflection:

Read the last paragraph of the sermon notes, and say the words of the Grace reflectively as you pray for your family and friends. Then continue in prayer, thanking God for his love, Jesus for his grace and the Holy Spirit for his fellowship.

The Way of Jesus: Father, Son, Spirit.

Read: John 14: 1-20. This week's theme goes back to the most basic question of our faith – who is God? And the Christian understanding is that **God is only fully known as Father, Son and Spirit**. One God in three persons.....Where does this threefold understanding of God's nature come from? From God himself, revealed gradually, over the course of time, because he wants people to know him and be in relationship with him. It's all part of the Big Story.

Let's look at it from the point of view of the disciples in John 14, as they struggled to make sense of the extraordinary things they were experiencing. We are eavesdropping on a very private conversation. The disciples were devastated; Jesus had just told them he wouldn't be with them much longer; he was leaving them, and they couldn't come with him. Most of us at some point have lost someone we admired, depended on, loved. Our world as we knew it has changed, it feels less secure, we don't know how we'll cope, we feel bereft. That's just how the disciples felt - they had invested everything in a person like no one else they'd ever met; they felt they were on the cusp of something really exciting, mind-blowing, life-changing..... and suddenly he announced he was leaving. Why?

They were seeing miracles of healing and exorcism and a power over nature that surely must come from God himself. As Jews they knew the scriptures, but they were hearing truths about God more clearly than ever before, with an authority that seemed to come from first-hand experience, not just book-learning. Almost as if Jesus had access to God's thoughts directly..... which of course would be blasphemy.....

And Jesus was saying the most outrageous things – like forgiving people their sins – that was blasphemy, too; or challenging what they'd been taught...."It's not enough to keep just to the strict letter of the Law, I'm telling you to go further. Don't murder, obviously, but don't even hate someone..... because God's way of loving is immeasurably greater than the Law; the kind of relationships he wants for his people can't be enforced by do's and don'ts...."

Where was Jesus coming from? Where did his authority come from? How come he could say *I tell you*? Where did his love and compassion and understanding come from? Who is he?

The disciples still had so many questions – their understanding of Jesus was being stretched, so was their understanding of God. Maybe they were beginning to get glimpses of the truth, but Jesus – leaving?. Surely that undermined everything? *Where are you going? Why can't I follow?* said Peter
We don't even know where you're going, so how can we know the way? said Thomas
Just show us the Father, and that will be enough, said Philip

So Jesus knows this is the moment to sit down with his little panic-stricken group and reassure them: *Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.*(v1)
They need to know who he is..... which inevitably turns into an explanation of **the nature of God himself**, and how they can know Him more completely through the **Son and the Spirit**.

Let's go back for a moment. The disciples were followers of the One true God. Their Jewish daily confession of faith starts: *Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* (Deut 6)

In the early days of awareness of God, this was the first and most important revelation of who he was. It was what set Israel apart from other tribes, who worshipped many gods, local deities who protected their own tribe, or needed appeasing. That's why the first commandment was 'You shall have no other gods before me'. Israel believed in **one true God**, and as time went on their understanding of him gradually expanded. They learnt that he is the Creator of everything, he is not limited by place or time, he is above and beyond all things. But crucially for Israel was that they discovered that this one true God had a special relationship with them – they were chosen, they were loved, and they were to be holy, or set apart to serve God, and God had a purpose for them, to bless the whole world through them.

This was the God the disciples believed in, and this is the God Jesus kept calling **my Father**. A Father presupposes a Son, and here in John 14 Jesus is pushing the disciples to make the connection, based on all the evidence they have seen for themselves. V9 *Don't you know me Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who sees me has seen the Father.... Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me?* He can't make it any clearer!

This is not a new multi-god, but a new revelation of the one true God – no wonder the disciples with their monotheistic Jewish background had problems taking it on board!

In the gospels Jesus is sometimes called the **Son of God**, and sometimes the **Son of Man** – both/and – he revealed in himself both what God looked like, and what being human could look like..... fully God, fully man, the Father's revelation of himself.

More is to come..... just as the disciples are coming to grips with this bigger Father/Son concept of God, Jesus comes back to the fact that he will not be seen in this physical form for much longer. He wants to reassure them that he's not leaving them alone...v16 *I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever.* Up until now Jesus has been their Counsellor, helper, comforter. **The Spirit** will be another Jesus, if you like, but because his presence will always be with them it will be an even more intimate relationship. V20 *Because I live, you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.* (Can't get closer than that) And the Spirit will continue Jesus' work of revealing truth about God – he is called the *Spirit of truth* v17.

But truth isn't just head knowledge – they know Jesus as a friend, they've shared meals, discussed ideas, laughed and wept together. And through Jesus they have come to know his Father in a more personal way, as we do when we visit a friend's house and meet their parents. Soon they will know God's Spirit in a similar way - active in their lives, empowering and equipping them, enabling them to continue Jesus' work. This new threefold understanding of God will become a reality. Jesus isn't giving the disciples, or us, dogma to believe, or a credal statement to recite – which is just as well, because we'll never get our heads round the complexities of eternal God! Instead he's inviting us to be involved in a relationship of love which already exists within God himself – Father, Son, Spirit. If God is love, it makes sense that his very nature should be relationship and community.

Paul summed it up perfectly in the closing words of 2 Corinthians: *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Every time we say this prayer, we are affirming the truth of the Trinity - not by a rational explanation, but by simply reminding ourselves of how each aspect of God is in relationship with us: we know the **grace** of Jesus because he chose to give his life for us, we know the **love** of the Father because he created us and has a purpose for us, we know the **fellowship** of the Spirit because he's always there alongside us.

Study

Read these OT verses – what hints do you find here already of the three-fold nature of God?

Genesis 1:2; Genesis 1:26; Exodus 31:1-3; Isaiah 11:1-3; Daniel 3:24-25;

Hebrews 1:1-3 What do these verses tell us about Jesus, his relationship with God, and his role within the Trinity?

Romans 8:12-17 Think about some of the different aspects of a father/son relationship: eg. **emotional** – Abba means 'Daddy' (v15) and **social** – we are heirs (v17). How is this a picture of our relationship with God?

John 16: 12-15 What will the Spirit do **for the disciples** according to these verses? And what insight do they give into the relationship **between** Father, Son and Spirit?