

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 2 April **Real Thing**

Pray Pray that we would be willing to have Jesus right at the centre of our lives and that we would be given both boldness and sensitivity to be able to speak out about him and live our lives for him.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Ezekiel 37:1-14.

Background The passage has overtones of death – perhaps a reminder of those who had died on the journey into exile, reminiscent of modern day refugees too. But in actual fact it is a very positive passage. Ezekiel is looking to a future, God's future, to a time when instead of being in exile and oppressed, God's people would once again have life and freedom. His outlook was likely very significantly different from his neighbours but the source of his confidence lay, not in his own strength, but in God's promise.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. How can you get new life from dead bones? Well we won't go into the issues of DNA and so on but it was a fair enough question. Israel's fortunes weren't great. Many people just didn't see a future for themselves or for their family. What different outlooks are there around the country just now? Why are they so varied? What do people base their vision of the future on? Why do these outlooks seem so insecure?
2. Ezekiel was probably regarded as off his head as his outlook was so out of keeping with most of his contemporaries. All around there were signs of hopelessness. People did not sense that they had any future to speak of but Ezekiel share the vision he had received from God – of life, in place of death; of a positive future in place of hopelessness. Do you see any parallels for our own time? If so, what?
3. How do we assess whether something is really of God and not just wishful thinking? Do we go along with everything or how do we decide? At times it isn't easy but on this Passion Sunday when traditionally churches have focussed particularly on the death of Jesus can we gain any insights that help us determine God's direction? On the one hand clearly God can do great things beyond our understanding. On the other, he chooses to use ordinary people like us. How do we ensure that we listen to God and do what he wants (not just what we'd like) but do it in his strength (not our own) and for his glory (not ours)?
4. How do we cope when we don't share the same vision as other Christians?
5. In a context where the Church isn't that healthy (growing fast throughout the world, but no so much here) how do we view the future? Would it help if we saw it more clearly to be GOD'S future? What practical differences might it make?
6. How can we make sure that we are thoroughly immersed in our community, that we are genuinely seen to care for our neighbours, that we don't bury ourselves away BUT that we are also still very open to God's leading and secure in his promise that we (and our community) have a future in him?
7. Discuss anything else arising from the passage or the service.

Prayer Lord, help us not despair about the state of the church nor about the society we live in. Help us to engage with people around us and to have the boldness and sensitivity to share the good news of Jesus in word and action – and to trust that you do have a future and a hope for us. Amen.