

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 13 January 2019 Through John's eyes

Pray that we would be willing to open to see and make the changes God requires us to make so as to be heading Jesus' way and doing his will – willing to let go of what we have become accustomed with in order to let Jesus "increase".

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Luke 3:15-17, 21,22

Background John had become a familiar, if rather odd, figure on the 1st century landscape. Very particularly he had styled himself after the manner of the prophets of old. His message, dress and lifestyle all contributed. He made a plea for repentance and preparation. He pointed to a day when God would restore the fortunes of his people and when they would live in harmony with his purposes – and he'd gathered the crowds. Yet, he was never going to be "mainstream" and he had his critics. Nevertheless he was making an impact and he certainly prepared the way for his relative Jesus. The baptism was a turning point – from the old to the new, from the era of law to that of grace. And in the words of the other gospel writer he was prepared to step back to make way for Jesus "I must decrease so that he may increase". From henceforth Jesus takes centre stage.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Change - New Year offers us all the opportunity to reflect on our lives and make changes we need. By now many people will have broken any resolutions they've made – perhaps you are the exception! But John's encounter here with Jesus had the potential for a huge sea change. How hard is it to step back in favour of someone else who might have something really significant to contribute a) at work, b) in a social or voluntary organisation c) the church? Why should that be? How could it be different if we see God's hand in it? How do we sense God's thinking? How might we help one another better to respond?
2. Seeing things from another's point of view can be difficult. Why do we hold on to what is precious to us so tightly? How do we honour our attachment and emotional attachment to our church building/style of worship/approach to things (as well as the personal connections we have with people) without fossilising things and cutting ourselves off from God wanting to do a "new thing"? The Spirit moves where it wills – how do we deal with change and upsetting of what makes us comfortable with the faith and church when it might be God's Spirit that is at work?
3. The Archbishop of Canturbury William Temple said that the Church was the one institution which is there primarily for those who are NOT its members. What is our congregation really there for? Is that borne out in our attitudes and commitment? Going forward, if Jesus' prime aim is for us to reach out to and love and serve those who are NOT part of our fellowship currently what might need to change?
4. We can't do everything. If we try we will be weighed down beyond our ability to cope. How do we decide what to stop in order to taking on something new a) as individuals? b) as a congregation? How do we match gifts and talents with the work that needs to be done? What can get in the way and how do we cope with that?
5. There is more to the Church than ministers though they can be a real resource for the Church and its mission but they are increasingly in short supply and there are likely to be even fewer of them soon. How can they be used better (not only to do "minister" things but to better equip the whole people of God to play their full part in the mission of the Church? The Bible sees them as being here to help the congregation in their ministry rather than the other way round. Feel free to comment.
6. Please discuss/consider anything else that arises from the passage or service.

Prayer Lord help us to be honest about our future as a congregation, to be open to change and to be willing to work closely with others to sense your will and engage in your mission. Amen.