

## WELCOME 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – 7 Easter '21 B

Mark 7:1-13 & John 3:1-17

**Welcome!** It's great to be together. As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources for you to use *over the course of the week*. *As God leads you into the fullness of His word/work in your life he will then introduce you to someone who needs to hear the good news from you. Also... somewhere here today you may feel a nudge - tap - tug. Don't ignore it! That's probably the Holy Spirit prompting you some way. Let's talk about that after worship.*

**As we move into this week...**John Calvin once wrote: **The** human heart is a perpetual idol factory." Archaeologists tell us that once early humans figured out how to survive, we began creating **objects** & places of worship. Carl Sagan, planetary scientist & astrophysicist who gave up his Jewish faith for scientific-agnosticism...even said, **We** are born to believe."

It's true: **God** has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. – Eccl 3:11b

Human hearts, designed for intimacy with their Creator turn to their own ends. Human hearts created to beat in time with God's instead seek out their own satisfaction & fulfilment. We all worship something. We all commit ourselves to something. We all devote our best to something. When we do it in the hopes of getting something better in return. **THAT** is "religion."

**Religion** is a business deal...you give something you get something back. Call it what you will: Peace of mind. Nirvana. Utopia. Valhalla. Better karma in the next life. Justice. Bliss. Youth. Power. Status. Money. Heaven. Religion is a business deal struck at the level of the heart that leaves the soul dying. But Jesus promises...

**God** sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Jesus Christ is the end of religion & the beginning of a relationship w/ the Father: a life-changing relationship of love & trust, freedom & forgiveness, peace, joy & hope, delight & satisfaction that never ends.

Only the risen Jesus grants freedom & fullness of life beyond...suffering, tolerance, addiction, politics anxiety shame guilt & **beyond** religion. There is only one deal...Jesus Christ crucified risen & ruling in love so you might live now & forever as God's beloved child. Scripture reassures us: **Christ** has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God. – Rom 10:4 "the end of the law"

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

### PRAYER OF THE DAY:

*God of love, you abide with us; you provide for all our needs and guide us in your ways. Out of gratitude for your saving grace & new life, we bring our lives praying that you use us for the work of your kingdom, that all may feast at the table of abundance, walk without fear, and drink deeply from the cup of compassion. Through Jesus Christ...Amen.*

Let's hear God's Word...

### **FAITH CHAT:**

1. How do your not-yet-Christian friends describe Christianity or faith in Jesus? Why would they say that? If you've never talked to them about it...Why not?
2. If someone says they are "spiritual but not religious," what do you think they mean?

Now we'll sing...All Creatures...

### **BLESSING/SENDING**

*May God bless the world in which you move, and bless your home and bless your friends.*

*May God bless the eyes with which you see, and bless the ears with which you listen.*

*May God bless the way you use your hands, bless the way you employ your tongues...*

*And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us now and always. Amen.*

## 7 Easter – '21 B – LIFE PULSE: LIFE BEYOND...RELIGION

The emails started Wednesday: **Federal** Budget highlights: "What it means for **you**". 1<sup>st</sup> from my superfund then others but it's been the newspaper headline/TV/Online news banner since the *proposed* Budget came out Tues night. As if the **ONLY** question that matters when the gov't makes a decision is "What's in it for me?" I love watching the street interviews where they ask folks in certain "voter blocs" how the budget serves their bloc...women seniors refugees NDIS recipients...ALL get the same question: "Here's what's in it for you. **Is that enough?**"

Human beings naturally see the world through the lens of "What's in it for me?" We are inherently self-centered. We do everything we can to spin the world on the axis of "me/myself/I." We do the cost/benefit analysis to determine if something's going to add value to me & my experience of the world. From houses to jobs to schools for the kids to cars & stores & restaurants to churches based on perceived ROI for us. Can this provide for me...interest me...excite me...take care of me? I recently heard advice from a parent to their kids: "Choose the job that pays the most & requires the least amount of work."

I think that's part of how Nicodemus approaches Jesus...I believe Nic is doing the "what's in it for me?"  $\frac{c}{B}$  calculus. Remember: Nic is a Pharisee, Jewish leader who knew the Mosaic Law back/front & followed it vigorously. He was a member of the Sanhedrin...religious judge...part of an elite group of rabbis who taught **AND enforced** the Law. Not just an **expert** but an **enforcer** called upon to determine punishment for those who fall short of the law's demands.

But he has seen enough in Jesus to cause him to start wondering if maybe there isn't more he can experience...more he can write into his CV...add to his skillset. By this point, as John recounts Jesus' life & ministry, Jesus has already begun his public ministry by changing water into wine @ a wedding, driven the merchants out of the Temple & carried out other "*miraculous signs*" at a Passover celebration in Jerusalem. Folks are starting to notice **AND** believe so Nic is more than mildly curious & maybe even hopeful that Jesus can add some new religious value to his life.

"**Rabbi,**" he said, "we all know God has sent you to teach us. Your *miraculous signs* are evidence God is with you." Nic thinks he's working from a position of strength & is looking to bulk out his spiritual portfolio. Nic has lived his whole life w/ a religious template & he continues to strive to fill it out as best he can. What's a template? **Take** your pick... Free attractive religious templates, perfect for every presentation. A template gives you a preset form or mold like a cookie cutter that never changes. You just have to choose which template you want to use. Nic lives that approach via the Law. For all of his Pharisee Sanhedrin Law expertise & mastery he sees his life in

much the same way the world sees all faith. You pick & choose among the options that seem to suit you...your personality...interests...strengths...comfort... (Pharisees vs Sadducees) folks actually still live that way...

Sure they do...14% of Ozs say they're "*spiritual but not religious.*" Means what? Life has purpose & meaning & you have to go deep inwardly to discover it...blend of beliefs & values from the major faiths of the world. 1 from column A 2 from B... Tick the boxes that fit for you, attend a church, pray now & then, put a few \$ in the plate & hey presto! you have the template look, feel & attitude of "Christian." Perhaps it is that kind of template living that leads 68% of Oz Xns to say they don't see faith as important in daily life & 1 in 2 Oz Xns to say they worship less than 1x/year or never... or who allow their children to decide if or when they'll be in worship...

Which is why Jesus replies, "**I** tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God...I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit..." Nic...you need new life...like the new wine at the wedding & the living water for the woman at the well Jesus didn't come so we could tick boxes & feel good about ourselves. He tells Nic & the rest of us that template living will kill you & the only solution is new life through him. Christianity is not about becoming better people. It's not about becoming a better version of ourselves through spiritual self-improvement. It's about looking outside of ourselves to the only One who has the power to change us from the inside-out. It's never about following set rules or being the best we can be. It's about Jesus, the only One who is worthy of our trust who grants new life & new birth through the Holy Spirit that pours out after Jesus has died/risen/returned to the Father to pray for each of us. *Rom 8:34*

We cannot hunt down righteousness & claim it like a big game trophy. We cannot lay hold of the Holy Spirit as if it can be manipulated by our reverent meditations & community-pleasing behaviour & morals. Nic, the bride/groom w/ empty wine jars & the woman at the well but still thirsty, & you & me are all in the same boat & Nic's mind just blew up. He had all the credentials & was more religiously qualified than anyone else. How could Jesus tell him his heritage, obedience to the law, & position of leadership counted for nothing? Because it counted for nothing...And if we take Paul seriously it counted for less than nothing...Paul called it garbage. "**Everything** else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ & become one with him." – *Phil 3:8-9* We often get lost in that language about being born again/from above/by the Spirit...but the crucial piece is what comes next.

**And** as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life."

You see...We often refer to what comes next in the text as the gospel in a nutshell...or the core of the good news...but I reckon too often we read those verses & feel the love but ignore the power – we wrap ourselves in the comfort & forget the cost. You see...Jesus tells Nicodemus the world needs new life because this one's broken. One of the earliest stories the Bible tells us is that human beings took this world, the way God designed, & took the freedom God had given them & promptly made a mess of things. We used our freedom to freely create chaos amongst ourselves, unbridgeable distance <sup>b/t</sup> us & God, & disharmony between ourselves & the world around us. Even if someone doesn't believe in a real Adam & Eve they know the story itself is true because we live that brokenness every day. We see it on our streets; read about it in the paper/TV, live it in our homes?

God can't pretend all that doesn't matter. So Jesus comes to do what that snake on a pole did. Hang there & give life to the dying. I don't know if you remember...

God freed the Israelites from horrible grinding slavery in Egypt. God brought them out to freedom in his presence so they might worship him & be his forever as he led them to their own land that he would give to them. But as they journey through the desert, they began to miss the comfort & security of their old slavery...an unknown future was too much for them to bear. They chose the certainty of their slavery over the uncertainty & responsibility & accountability of being God's children. So they began to complain. The context of that old story is of human rebellion against God – human disobedience – human dissatisfaction <sup>w/</sup> what God is doing in their lives.

Somehow deliverance from slavery & daily provision for their needs isn't enough & they complain, grumble, become impatient & want their way & they want it NOW! Later Moses would remind them that during their whole 40 years in the desert "your clothes didn't wear out, & your feet didn't blister or swell." (Deut 8:4) but obviously that wasn't enough. So God brought upon them the punishment they deserved (bitten by snakes) & then only by utter dependence on God (look up to a bronze snake on a tall pole) could they be delivered from what their own hard-heartedness had brought upon them...death.

Jesus says that's now **HIS** job...because like those early Israelites we too find any excuse to be dissatisfied - to grumble - to choose our way over God's way - to be afraid of the unknowns of the future - to have everything we could ever want & still want more & hang on to what we know one day we'll have to lose... Jesus tells Nic the only solution is new life because this one's broken. Jesus comes to do what that snake on a pole did. Hang there & give life to the dying...that would be you & me... us...the world.

**"For** this is how God loved the world: He gave his one & only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." Absolutely, but for that to happen...

Jesus has to die. We need to experience the comfort, but we dare not forget the cost God pays. The ground of our hope is never that we will get it right, individually or as a church. The ground of our hope is that there is someone who knows us, who knows how unreliable we can be, & who has come to give himself for us. He is the only real deal. He invites us to come to him & trust him. In Jesus death is destroyed, hell itself is overthrown & the enemies of God (us) are reconciled & recreated as his true beloved children.

But even more than **that**...Jesus assures us that this power of God poured out in him is...at...work...**now**. **"I tell** you the truth, those who listen to my message & believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life." – Jn 5:24 That's Jesus...assuring you & me that the power of God that changes our eternal future is also at work to change today & tomorrow & the day after that... Trusting in Jesus is not something we save up for our last days...If we're not living in faith now we're wasting time. Pr Tim Keller says: "The gospel creates an entire way of life & affects literally everything about us." Which is a creative way of reframing Gal 2:20 - **My** old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me.

Nic didn't get this all at once either...but bit by bit... Jn 7...religious leaders have decided Jesus is dangerous & must be arrested & some decide he must die. But Nicodemus, argues, "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" It's a word of caution... but the other leaders turn their anger upon him...Nicodemus makes one last appearance in John...at the foot of the cross. It is Nicodemus <sup>w/</sup> Joseph of Arimathea who ask Pilate for permission to bury Jesus. The Spirit is doing its work...not even Nic can fully comprehend

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Only the risen Jesus grants freedom & fullness of life beyond everything of this world There is only one deal...Jesus Christ crucified risen & ruling in love so you might live now & forever as God's beloved child.

**Take** it home...

1. What "new birth" will you allow Jesus to bring to you this week?
2. If someone were to ask "What is the gospel?" Could you share it in less than 3 sentences? 30 secs... **GO**...I'll pray for us to close...