



CANDIDATES SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY

Scripture Passage:

- Colossians 3:1-2 (*The Message*)

‘So if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up and be alert to what is going on around Christ - that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.’

INTRODUCTION

Share together in some questions to help set the scene:

- What has God been saying to you today or in the last few days?
- Where do we see God active in our corps church community?
- What is he doing?

These questions are based on an assumption that God *is* speaking and active and that we are listening for him and looking for what he is doing. What answers did you come up with?

It is hoped that positive things will be shared. If not, maybe pose the question: How can we seek to know God’s active presence amongst us?

EXPLORE

The theme for this year’s Candidates Sunday presents quite a challenge to the idea of a God who is silent and still. Paul writes with energy and purpose to encourage new Christians to see themselves as part of all that God is doing in the world - in the whole cosmos, in fact - through Christ.

Reading what Paul has to say prompts us to wake up and pay attention and realise that what began at Pentecost because of the death and resurrection of Jesus is still going on. In that sense, what Paul writes is vital and new in every generation.

In all things

- If it were hard to find things to say, does it mean God is quiet and inactive where you are? Or is it that we are just not listening or looking in the right places?
- In John 14:25,26 Jesus said: ‘All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you’ (NIV).



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- This seems to suggest a possible dialogue is going on between us and the Holy Spirit pretty much all the time: 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working' (John 5:17). Does this suggest a quiet, inactive God?

The Colossians

- Colossians is a letter written by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome around 55-60 AD. It is a letter of encouragement to a Christian community he has never met but who would know who he was.
- Epaphras, who brought the gospel to Colossae, worked with Paul and would share his imprisonment (Colossians 1:7; 4:12 and Philemon 23). It was Epaphras who had brought 'Paul's gospel' to them, a gospel of inclusion which had broken free of its Jewish roots - no longer did non-Jews have to keep the Jewish laws to be accepted as Christians.
- It challenged the religious ideas both of the pagan world from which the Colossian church emerged and that of the early Christians, because for Paul, Jesus is central to everything, including who we are. For him Christ *in us* is our hope of glory! (Colossians 1:27).
- Paul was a revolutionary in that sense, upsetting settled ideas, and his letter to Colossae is about that revolution which had taken place in the world because of Christ and in those who believed in him. It is an invitation to participate, to be part of what God is doing by the Holy Spirit, and to know he is cheering them on.
- Paul gives us a dynamic image of Jesus. He is the source of everything and holds everything together (Colossians 1:17). That is quite a leap from the perception of the disciple group when they first knew Jesus. What were some of their reactions to the things he did and said?

Understanding Jesus

- Consider too the understanding of the first Jewish Christians who saw Jesus as the promised Messiah and bringer of the Kingdom of God into their world. Read Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:22-41). How different are these images of Jesus?
- For Peter, his understanding of Jesus when he spoke to the crowd was new. It was only six weeks before that he had found his place again in the disciple group (John 21:15-19), and not that long before he had understood that Jesus was the Messiah (Luke 9:18-20).
- Peter is telling what he knows. Later he will write in ways that echo Paul as he speaks of our sharing the divine life (2 Peter 1:4), but understanding takes time. How has your understanding of Jesus changed over time?



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- The Colossian letter at its simplest is about understanding ourselves in relation to Christ. Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul by repeating what he had implied earlier (1:27): 'The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you' (Colossians 1:27 *The Message*).

DISCUSSION

Paul invites us to understand our relationship with Jesus as something which is dynamic. If we imagine the movement of the planets and the solar system, or the interaction of forces that change and control the weather, or how life begins and is sustained, we can maybe capture the idea of the unseen forces that govern our existence. Paul names that unseen force in Jesus.

In the Church he is the head and his Spirit its life force, regardless of any organisational structures put in place. In us the same truths apply - we are in submission to him as Lord and his life in us defines our spiritual experience.

With this sense of connectedness read again Colossians 3: 1,2 (*The Message*).

- Do you think we do *shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of us* rather than experiencing this dynamic interaction with Christ. Why is this?
- What difference would it make to us if we did as Paul suggests and shift the perspective from where we are - *absorbed with what is right in front of us* - to seeing things *from his perspective*. How would that impact our own spiritual lives? How would it impact how we do church?
- Paul talks about being *serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ*. That implies it is possible not to take it too seriously. If we do take it seriously, what does that mean?
- How does this contrast with our experience of church and reflect our own contribution as men and women *serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ*?
- If there is this connectedness and dynamic purpose between Christ and the Church, we can suppose that his purpose in raising and equipping leaders is just as real as when he invited the twelve to train to be apostles. Why is it that response to leadership is so limited these days?

FINAL REFLECTION

If we are alert to the reality of spiritual things and alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and our individual dialogue with him, it becomes easier to see what Christ is doing and focus our attention there. It also makes us more attentive to the part we are asked to play - and we all do have a part to play.



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- What conclusions have we drawn from the study and the discussions?
- Have they challenged, changed or shaped our thinking?
- Would it be helpful to investigate individual spiritual gifting and consider how we contribute to our local church community? There are helpful tools available to do that.
- Has this exercise made you aware of any promptings from Christ towards leadership? How else is he calling you?

Lord Jesus, in a challenging and changing world, help us to understand the resources and strength we have because of 'Christ in us'. Thank you because your purpose in coming into the world has not changed. Thank you because it continues through the Church, through us. Amen.