



The **Methodist** Church

# CHAPLAINCY EVERYWHERE



SESSION TWO

## As Christ in the World

The coming of the eternal Son to earth in the person of Jesus Christ changes everything. This session focuses on his life, death and resurrection and how the significant themes of incarnation, sacrifice and witnessing to the risen Christ shape our understanding and expression of chaplaincy.

# Welcome

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The previous session tried to take in the panorama of God's mission: to shape connected and collaborative communities. This 'God-focused community' is the space in which personhood is nurtured and creative work released. It is here we learn to reflect God's glory and grow in freedom and responsibility.

We thought about how death, decay and isolation have ravaged the earth since we chose to disobey God, disconnected from his life-giving presence. We thought about our need for a saviour who could reconnect us to the life of God and heal us from our deepest brokenness.

During this session we are going to focus on the coming of the eternal Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ. We will see how his life, death and resurrection can help us to think more deeply about chaplaincy.

The next two sessions form a biblical framework from which a healthy and lasting chaplaincy ministry might emerge. The material is deep and yet practical, so hold on to your seats as we travel far and fast!

## Opening Prayer

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Take a few moments to focus on God as creator, redeemer and sustainer. You might find it helpful to light a candle or play some music. At an appropriate time, say together the words of the following prayer.

**Eternal One, who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.**

**We thank you that you came to save us, transform us and fill us with your life!**

**We invite you in this moment to continue to shape us into your image.**

**Show us how you are calling us to collaborate in your mission.**

**Inspire us to go where you send us, to love as you love.**

**For the glory of God: creator, redeemer and sustainer.**

**Amen.**

# The Creative Word

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“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John 1:1-5 (NRSV)

The opening words of John’s Gospel offer a stunning description of creation. The word, or wisdom, was thought to have been active in the creation of the universe, not as a ‘thing’, but as a person. Creation came into being through the word. Not only was the word with God in the beginning, but we are told that the word was God. This is mind bending stuff! If that were not enough, John goes on to say something that is even more wonderful.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14 (NRSV)

The power of John’s testimony is remarkable; God came to us in bodily form. And there is even more! In his first letter, John tells us:

“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us —”

1 John 1:1-2 (NRSV)

This is simply overwhelming. John tells us that the eternal Son, who was full of grace and truth – the eternal life – touched us, walked with us and spoke to us. Christians call this the incarnation; God in flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.

You may want to spend a few moments in silence to reflect and worship before you proceed with the group conversation.

# Stories about Jesus



Spend up to ten minutes answering the following questions as a group. Use the questions to focus your conversation. Use the space below to write down your thoughts.

- What words, Gospel stories, Scriptures and thoughts come to mind when you think about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ?

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- What qualities do you attribute to Jesus?

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- If you have time, give some examples of the ways in which Jesus Christ has worked in your own life. Share a few short stories.

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# One of Us: Fully Human



The real force of the incarnation is felt as we begin to read the Gospel accounts and see Jesus go about his daily life. We read about how he felt emotions as we do, shed tears at the loss of a friend, celebrated a friend's wedding – even providing a few bottles! We learn that he worked with wood, no doubt gaining a splinter or two, and cooked breakfast on a beach for his hungry friends.

Jesus trod the same dirt as us, grew tired and hungry as we do, faced temptation and needed his own space away from the crowds. We are told that Jesus regularly touched the untouchables, spoke with the outcasts and gave dignity to the least. At the end of his Gospel, John tells us that

“But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”  
John 21:25 (NRSV)

Of all the stories we could focus on, let us focus on one which has all the qualities of a chaplaincy encounter.

**Bible reading:** John 4:1-42



You may want to share the reading among members of the group.

- Spend a few minutes talking about some of the things that you notice in this encounter.



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- What is going on here?

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- What do the details tell you?

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# Seen through the lens of chaplaincy



So many of the powerful qualities of chaplaincy originate from the life of Jesus. Observing this story through the lens of chaplaincy helps us to pinpoint what is so instructive about this encounter at Jacob's Well.

## **In other places**

The first thing we notice is that Jesus travelled to Galilee with his disciples through Samaria. Samaria was a place that Jews tended to avoid as they felt great animosity towards Samaritans, considering them to be unclean because they practised other religions alongside Judaism. Because of this, Jews would travel around Samaria by another route – but not Jesus!

The Gospels tell us that Jesus conducted his ministry mostly outside the synagogue: in the market places and villages, along dusty streets and on hillsides. In this story, Jesus goes a step further and travels into what many would consider to be hostile territory.

In the same way, chaplaincy takes place outside the comfort zone of our Christian communities; in places of commerce and industry, on the streets, in the many places where people gather. As you can see in this story, these are often the places where life-changing encounters happen. They are the spaces where God is already at work and calls us to be.

## **Sensitive to people and their needs**

Secondly, the person in this encounter is not only a Samaritan, but a woman too. Hebrew men did not normally speak with women in public. Yet, Jesus sits with a woman at Jacob's Well at noon. Those details tell us a lot. Women tended to draw water in the morning and evening to avoid the heat of the day. This woman came at noon, why? The answer has to do with the scandal that surrounded her. She had been married five times and was now with a man who was not her husband; a woman like this would have been shunned by the other women. So in the heat of the noonday sun, a tired Jesus asked for water and broke down three cultural barriers: the Son of God associated with Samaritans, spoke and gave dignity to a woman and associated with scandal.

Like Jesus, chaplains are sensitive to people and their needs. They notice people and give dignity and honour to each and every person they meet, no matter where they come from, who they are or what they have done.

## **Listening to the deeper questions**

Thirdly, Jesus has an everyday conversation with the woman. He asks her for a drink of water. Using an ordinary way in to conversation, Jesus is able to take the conversation to another level by listening to the deeper questions the woman asked. He discerned the questions behind her questions and then spoke of a deeper truth. Not only that, but he was able to satisfy her longing for living water. This was a life-giving conversation. Chaplaincy conversations often have this life-giving quality, as we point to the source of abundant life forever.

## A chaplaincy encounter

This is an insightful story for chaplains. Jesus, with great sensitivity and care, took the time to speak with an outcast. The woman received dignity, enlightenment, encouragement and was sent on her way refreshed. Not only that, but she became a witness to the Messiah and told everyone in the village what Jesus had done for her. Through this encounter many lives were changed as well as her own.

## Pausing at this well

Before we move on, it is worth pausing at this well for a few moments longer.



Before you reflect on the following questions, pour a glass of water from a jug. Listen to the water flowing into the glass; watch as the water falls and splashes.

- What places do you travel through and where are the wells at which people gather?



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- What are some of the needs that you see there?

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- What are some of the deeper questions that you have heard in your conversations with others? How might you respond to them?

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# The Way of the Cross

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“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8 (NRSV)

It was because of his barrier-breaking encounters that Jesus became a target of the religious leaders of the day. Eventually they plotted to kill Jesus; Holy Week recounts the events that lead up to his death as the people who shouted “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday shouted “Crucify him” on the Friday.

Whatever you say about the cross, you cannot escape the central concept of sacrificial love. The death of Christ was a brutal and gruesome event. It was incredibly costly, yet in it we see an act of God that changes everything. This act of sacrifice touches every aspect of creation. It is the ultimate redemptive act that can restore, heal and reconnect us to God’s blessing of abundant life forever – God in Jesus making all things new! The cross is the ultimate expression of God’s unconditional, self-sacrificing love. As John’s Gospel reminds us, in words that are often clouded by over-familiarity.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

John 3:16 (NRSV)

## Breaking down barriers

The crucifixion doesn’t look like a victory. The way of the cross doesn’t appear to be powerful. If anything, you might assume that it was a display of weakness that ended in defeat; an act of failure not triumph.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, we see him, in stories like the woman at the well, breaking down barriers of exclusion. The Kingdom of God as evidenced in Jesus’ ministry had to do with releasing captives, healing the broken, feeding the poor, touching the despised, embracing the excluded and speaking of a God who is near to us, closer than a whisper, and who longs for prodigal children to return to his open arms.

Breaking down barriers is a good way to think about what the death of Jesus does. In fact, Matthew’s Gospel tells us that, at the moment of Jesus’ death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Matthew 27:50-51). The curtain separated both people and priests from the Holy of Holies, the place where God’s holy presence dwelt. The torn curtain became a powerful symbol of open access to God through Christ’s death; talk about reconciliation! The death of Christ reconnects us to the love and life of God in the deepest way.



# Chaplaincy in the way of the cross



The ministry of chaplaincy is profoundly shaped by the events of the cross. Many of the themes apply directly to the way in which chaplains approach their work.

## Love and sacrifice

Chaplaincy is firstly a ministry that is motivated by love for God and others. To reach out to those outside our church communities is an act of compassion. Responding to other people's needs is often an act of sacrifice; serving others often comes at great personal cost.

## Gentle strength

Chaplaincy may appear to be a ministry of weakness. However, the truth is that it only appears to be weak. As Christ shows us, loving others is anything but weak; sacrificial love is the strongest love of all. The cross shows us that God's mission cannot be realised when we are powerful and confident but only when we are weak and at a loss. This quiet strength is a distinctive quality of chaplaincy.

- In what ways can we serve others?



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- Why might chaplaincy appear to be weak?



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- Can you identify an example of what the values of sacrificial love and quiet strength might look like in your own community?



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# Resurrection Power



If the cross defeated the power of sin, then the resurrection defeated the power of death and validated the life and death of Jesus Christ and the reality of God's Kingdom. It was Jesus' return from the dead that confirmed his claim to be God's anointed Messiah. Furthermore, seen from the vantage point of the empty tomb, what appeared to be foolishness was shown to be wise; what appeared weak became the most powerful act in all history; what might have been seen as humiliation revealed the glory of God.

## Resurrection and the renewal of creation

The idea of resurrection was a powerful one in Jewish thought. The physical resurrection of the body was closely related to the renewal of creation as a whole and the coming of God's ultimate reign. The resurrection of Jesus Christ shows us that the Kingdom of God, his rule and reign, is embodied in his life and ministry and is here to stay! Hans Kung said that "the Kingdom of God is creation healed". This powerful thought is made valid by the claims of those who witnessed the risen Christ.

The most common summary of the Early Church's missionary message was that they were witnesses to the risen Christ. Theirs was a message of joy, hope and victory; their lives were the first fruit of God's ultimate triumph over sin and death.

## Conversations on the way

One such resurrection account is particularly relevant as we consider chaplaincy.



**Bible reading:** Luke 24:13-35



Jesus walked along a dusty road with a couple who had been caught up in the events in Jerusalem and had been close to Jesus' disciples. Jesus joined them as they walked, veiling his identity as he asked the question, "What happened?" They recounted the events surrounding Jesus' death and the testimony of the women, but seemed confused. They were clearly troubled by all that had happened. Jesus then helped them to make sense of the recent events in Jerusalem.

The road to Emmaus is a remarkable story of unfolding revelation through conversations that happened along the way. Similarly, chaplaincy is a conversational ministry that often happens along the way. Chaplains listen to other people's stories – both the anecdotes from their lives and the deeper questions asked – and respond as they walk with them for a while. In the same way that Jesus helped the people walking along the road to Emmaus make sense of what had happened, chaplains can help others make sense of what is happening to them. Sometimes chaplaincy can be a ministry of walking with others but not knowing the answers.

Sometimes the most loving and constructive thing a chaplain can say is, "I don't understand what is happening to you or to those you care about either, but I will stay with you anyway so that you are not alone in this." Chaplaincy is very much about having conversations on the way. These are conversations that count!

## Helping people understand



Spend a few minutes talking as a group about some of the themes you have just considered.

- How does what you have just heard and read help you think about your community?

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# Conclusions

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As we conclude this session, it is worth reminding ourselves of some of the chaplaincy themes we have considered.

- The incarnation speaks of a sending God. The Father sends the Son in the power of the Spirit. The theme of being sent occurs time and time again in Scripture and is central to chaplaincy; chaplains are first of all 'sent'!
- Not only that, but in the same way that the incarnation speaks of God getting on our level, chaplains enter into other people's experiences.
- The story of the woman at the well shows that Jesus operated mainly among people outside of the synagogue.
- Chaplaincy too happens outside the gathered community of church.
- The coming of Jesus to live among us is an act of solidarity and the ultimate act of sacrificial love. Chaplaincy is also an act of solidarity, sacrificial love and empathy.
- Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus observed and responded to the deeper issues behind people's questions. Chaplains listen to what is going on and respond. That is different from saying that chaplaincy conversations are all serious!
- Chaplaincy is first and foremost a ministry motivated by our love for God and others. The sacrificial love of Jesus Christ is a model for the way in which we love.
- The road to Emmaus is an example of helping people to make sense of what has happened and what is happening. Chaplains help people make sense of their lives and walk with them when things do not make sense.

The example of Jesus Christ has so much to teach us about the nature of chaplaincy today. Next time we will build upon these themes as we consider Jesus' ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and chaplaincy that is shaped by God's good future.

# Prayers and Dismissal

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**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come; thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

(From the *Methodist Worship Book*, NRSV)

**Jesus said “as the Father sent me, so I send you”;  
so go now and be in the world.  
Walking with others in solidarity and love; testifying to the risen Christ.  
May his joy so fill you that others see in your faces that he is alive;  
making all things new.  
Amen.**

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Lord's Prayer taken from the *Methodist Worship Book* (NRSV) (1999, Methodist Publishing).

Hans Kung quoted from *On being a Christian* (Collins, 1978)