

Session 2

Transforming Lives God who is just



In this session we look at our encounter with the God who is just and how this makes a difference to our lives, relationships and attitude to the rest of the world.

Introductory Worship (taken from Deuteronomy 32:3-4)

Divide into 2 groups A and B to read the phrases then all join in with the words in bold type.

- A We will proclaim the name of the Lord
Praise the greatness of our God!
- A He is the Rock, his works are perfect.
B And all his ways are just.
Praise the greatness of our God!
- A A faithful God who does no wrong
B Upright and just is he.
Praise the greatness of our God!

Icebreaker

Take some recent newspapers and distribute different pages to members of the group. Look through and find a story which you think most upsets God. Share it with the others.

Can you find a story that you think would please God? Why?

I have heard their cry

This is a familiar story from the Old Testament in which Moses is called by God to free the Israelites from their difficult and unjust situation in Egypt.

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Moses had fled to the wilderness after killing an Egyptian who was ill-treating one of his fellow Israelites. For this reading you will need a Narrator, God and Moses. The reading is from Exodus 3:1-12⁹.

Narrator: Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought,

Moses: "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up."

Narrator: When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush,

God: "Moses! Moses!"

Moses: "Here I am."

God: "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Narrator: At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

God: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

Moses: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

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God: "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Moses: "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God: "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.' "

Some questions

- God says to Moses: "where you are standing is holy ground". Have you ever had a similar experience of sensing 'holy ground'?
- Can you think of a time when you felt God called you to get involved with a person or people who were suffering?
- After Moses had encountered God, his plans and concerns changed. Since encountering God how have your plans and concerns changed? For example think about work or your local community or your family or even global situations. Share your thoughts with the group.

Moses was hesitant to respond to God's call to get involved. Read the following prayer.¹⁰

A prayer – you asked

Pause as a group, then read the following...

You asked for my hands that you might use them for your purpose.
I gave them for a moment then withdrew them for the work was hard.

You asked for my mouth to speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.

You asked for my eyes to see the pain of poverty.
I closed them for I did not want to see.

You asked for my life that you might work through me.
I gave a small part that I might not get too involved.

Lord, forgive my calculated efforts to serve you only when it is convenient for me to do so, only in those places where it is safe to do so, and only with those who make it easy to do so.

Father, forgive me, renew me
send me out as a usable instrument
that I might take seriously the meaning of your cross.

- Pick out any phrase in the prayer that you think describes your response to God's call and share that with one other person in the group.
- "Take seriously the meaning of your cross". As a group talk about what difference you think the cross makes to how you live your life for God.

There was once a king¹¹

Ask someone in your group to read this story.

There was once a king who built a large and beautiful palace and gave it to his four children to live in. The first brother to arrive took all the upstairs rooms for himself. The first sister to arrive took all the downstairs rooms for herself. They spent much of their time arguing and fighting, because each one wanted to be in charge of the whole palace.

When the second brother and sister arrived there were no rooms left for them. "As I am very kind" said the first brother to the younger one, "I will give you one of my very own rooms if you do all the work in the fields, growing all the food." "I am very kind too," said the first sister to the younger one, "so I will give you one of my very own rooms if you do all the cooking and cleaning and washing."

Of course the rooms offered were the smallest of the many rooms in the whole palace but the younger brother and sister had no choice if they wanted a roof over their heads. So they worked all day long, growing the food, cooking, cleaning and washing. They knew that this was not what

their father had wanted for them when he built the large and beautiful palace, because he loved all four of his children equally. But the work was so hard that they were too tired to complain to their elder brother and sister.

When the elder brother saw the younger one become ill from overwork he said, "I will give him some medicine to make him better. I'm sure my father will be pleased with me for my kindness." When the elder sister saw the younger one was cold because her clothes were thin and worn out, she said, "I will give her the black coat that has got too tight for me. I'm sure my father will be pleased with me for my kindness."

Then, one day, when nobody was expecting him, the king arrived at the palace to visit his children.

- And the outcome was... !
Discuss what you think happened next in the story.

Your Kingdom come

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Generations of Christians have faithfully prayed the Lord's Prayer 'Thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven'. But what do the words mean?

- What do you think of when you pray 'thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven'?
- If tomorrow, when everyone woke up, God's reign and rule (his Kingdom) had actually come to earth as in heaven what would be different? What would people quickly notice had changed?!
- Write people's ideas and answers on a big sheet of paper, and perhaps pin them up in church on Sunday.

A vision of the Holy City ¹²

This writing brings together ideas from Ezekiel 43 and Revelation 21 and 22. Instead of those ideas being about a New Jerusalem in the future and somewhere else, the ideas are applied to Glasgow. This was written in the mid-1990s.

Ask someone to read this piece.

Then try one or more of the suggested exercises and questions.

I saw a vision; it was last Tuesday at 11 o'clock in the morning. I was looking down on **the city** when the fresh blue summer sky broke open above my head and the Spirit of God breathed on my eyes and my eyes were opened. I saw **Glasgow**, the holy city coming down out of heaven shining like a rare jewel, sparkling like clear water in the eye of the sun, and all the sickness was gone from **the city**. There were no more **suburbs and schemes**, no difference between the big houses in **Bearsden** and the **tenements in Maryhill**.

I saw the river **Clyde** flowing with the water of life, as bright as crystal, as clear as glass, and the children of **Glasgow** swimming in it. And the Spirit showed me the tree of life growing on **Glasgow Green**.

I looked out and there were no more homeless people,
no more women working the streets,
no more junkies up the alleys,
HIV and AIDS was a thing of the past,
there were no more racist attacks,
there were no more attacks on gay people,
there were no more rapists,
there were no more **stabblings**,
there was no more '**Protestants and Catholics**',
no more **IRA graffiti** and no more **Orange marches**,
because there was no more hate.

I saw women walking safe at night, and the men full of passion and gentleness, and none of the children were ever abused because the people's sex was full of justice and joy.

Then I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away ... the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God ... down the middle of the great street of the city.
(Revelation 21:2,4 and Revelation 22:1-2)

I saw an old woman throw back her head and laugh like a girl.

And when the sky closed back, her laughter rang in my head for days and days, and would not go away. This was what I saw looking out from the **Gallowgate**, looking up from the city of death, and I knew that there would be a day of redemption.

Either

In the above we have highlighted those words and phrases that make this a piece of creative writing about Glasgow. One way of exploring it – once you have read it as a group – would be to go through and replace the highlighted words with your own local places and situations.

Or

Discuss as a group what issues and places you would include, if you were to write a similar piece for your local community. What would be in your vision of the 'New Jerusalem' for where you live or work?

- Can someone in your group write-up the ideas you share, and maybe display it in church on Sunday?

Worship

Here is a selection of resources for worship. Choose just **one or two**.

The Lord's Prayer

Pray the Lord's Prayer in whatever form is usual for your group.

Newspaper intercessions

Ask everyone in turn to place their part of the newspaper (used at the beginning) in the middle of the circle and in a few words share an issue from it which concerns them. After each one everyone says together 'Through our lives and by our prayers your Kingdom come.' Or your group may like to spend some time in open prayer for these various situations.

A prayer from Iona¹³

Place three candles in the centre of the group and choose three readers. Each reader lights one of the candles before saying the prayer. All join in with the words in bold type.

1 I will light a light in the name of the Maker,
All **Who lit the world and breathed the breath of life for me.**

Think about the things you have thought tonight about you and your community – the place you live, or work or meet others. Pause...

2 I will light a light in the name of the Son,
All **Who saved the world and stretched out his hand to me.**

Think about what you have thought about God wanting you to live and work for him – bringing good and God to others, and standing against what is wrong and not of God. Pause...

3 I will light a light in the name of the Spirit,
All **Who encompasses the world and blesses my soul with yearning.**

Think about what others have said from their personal stories – their struggles and successes as a Christian. Pause...

All **We will light three lights for the Trinity of Love:
God above us, God beside us, God beneath us:
the beginning, the end, the everlasting One.**

A South African Creed¹⁴

It is not true that this world and its inhabitants are doomed to die and be lost.

All **This is true:
for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him shall not die
but have everlasting life.**

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction.

All **This is true:
"I have come that they may have life,
and have it abundantly".**

It is not true that violence and hatred shall have the last word, and that war and destruction have come to stay forever.

All **This is true:**
for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, in whom authority will rest and whose name will be Prince of Peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil that seek to rule the world.

All **This is true:**
"to me is given all authority in heaven and on earth, and I am with you always to the end of the world".

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the church, before we can do anything.

All **This is true:**
"I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, and your old folk shall dream dreams".

Action together

Fair trade drinks

Drink a fair-trade drink together – coffee, tea, juice or even better wine!

As you drink, imagine the difference made to a family – the father who is probably a worker on the plantation, the mother who perhaps helps pack or prepare the produce, and their children.

Take Away

On pages 27 and 28 you will find a personal spiritual exercise, based on Moses meeting God.

Alternatively you might use the spiritual exercise on page 3, called 'Looking at life with God'.

Take Away – Week 2

Read Exodus 3:1-12 ¹⁵.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up."

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey... And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you.

IMAGINE:

Close your eyes and imagine the scene – a bare, rocky landscape with a few bits of scrubby vegetation.

A vast area of emptiness – no houses, no people, just a flock of sheep wandering about.

Suddenly as you look around you see a small bush on fire. Go forwards and look at it more closely. See the flames darting about. Note the colours – red, yellow, orange. Feel the warmth.

Imagine that you hear God's voice calling your name. What does that feel like?

God tells you to take off your shoes. You are standing on holy ground because God is there.

God talks to you movingly about people he cares for who are suffering and unjustly treated.

What situation comes to mind for you?

God says he wants to use you to bring about change there...

- Keep this in mind through the following week.
- Jot down any thoughts that come to you.
- Share with someone else (a partner, friend or your priest) what God might be asking you to do.