



Being Good News for Our Community - Spring 2017

Study 1 - Being Good News

2 Corinthians 2:12-3:6; Matthew 5:13-16

(sermons on Jan 22nd)



Introduction to Series

The theme of our series from Jan 22nd to Mar 19th is Being Good News for Our Community. On Sundays we are likely to focus on how as a church we can be good news for the communities of Trull and Angersleigh (the outlines of the two parishes are in the top-right-hand corner). We are aware that many members of our congregations live, work and take part in activities outside those parish boundaries. We hope that we shall learn together from the Bible more of what it means to be the People of God and the Body of Christ in whatever community we find ourselves, whether in Trull and Angersleigh, or beyond. This series follows on from 'Life on the Frontline' in Spring 2013 and 'Fruitfulness on the Frontline' in Spring 2015 but with more emphasis on what we do corporately, rather than just as individuals, and on the impact we could make on the community, rather than only on individuals – but it's all part of our goal of 'becoming and making mature disciples of Jesus in Trull and Angersleigh and beyond'. Bible passages have been chosen to fit each topic, but let's be open to whatever God may want to say to us through them.

Introduction to his Week's Topic

Before reading the Bible, your group might like to share thoughts on these questions:

What impression do people in Trull and Angersleigh have of the church? How do we know?

Positive or negative? Involved in the community or doing-our-own-thing? Caring? Practical?

What impression would we *like* people in Trull and Angersleigh to have of the church? Why?

And how would we answer those questions for the wider church?

2 Corinthians 2:12 – 17 The Aroma of Christ

In the Bible there are two letters from Paul to the Christians in Corinth and accounts of two of Paul's visits to Corinth in Acts. Corinth was the largest city in Greece and the small Christian church was under pressure from rich pagan temples that dominated the city and Jewish teachers who opposed Paul. At the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Paul is defending his authority and his teaching by describing two marks of the genuine Christian message: it 'smells right' because it points to Jesus (2:12-17) and it is supported by the evidence of changed lives, living letters rather than dead letters (3:1-6).

v.12 When I went to Troas – a port in what is now on the Asian coast of Turkey, opposite Greece. Whilst he had been further away from them in Ephesus, Paul had received worrying reports about immorality and division in the church in Corinth. Paul had sent a stern letter and was waiting for further news of them from his colleague Titus, who was acting as messenger.

v.12 to preach the gospel of Christ – 'gospel' = 'good news'; 'Christ'(Greek) = 'Messiah'(Hebrew) = 'Anointed One': king, or God's special representative, as promised in the Old Testament. So the heart of Paul's message is that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who is bringing in God's Kingdom.

v.12 the Lord had opened a door for me – Paul tried to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that he went to places where God was preparing the people to receive his message.

v.13 no peace of mind – Paul was concerned about the church in Corinth and was waiting for news via Titus, who was taking the overland route from Corinth through Macedonia (northern Greece).

v.14 Thanks be to God – Paul turns to praise as he remembers meeting Titus in Macedonia and hearing encouraging news of repentance and growth in Corinth (as Paul explains later, in chapter 7).

v.14 who always leads us in triumphal procession – whatever the local outward circumstances, Paul sees the spiritual reality of the constant growth of Christ's Kingdom, like a victory procession where some people would be cheering the leader and others would be prisoners awaiting their fate.

- v.15 *we are to God the aroma of Christ – there are two ideas here: (i) our lives and message are the way that people sense/smell what Jesus is like. (ii) we please God when we point to Jesus in this way.*
- v.16 *the smell of death – what is meant to be good news is the message of judgment if people reject it*
- v.17 *we do not peddle the word of God for profit – unlike many other religious teachers in Paul's time*

1. What sort of people and what sort of message please God, rather than impressing the society around us? How can we create the right aroma/atmosphere as a church?
2. What does Paul say about straightforwardness and integrity and how does he show it in describing his concern for the Corinthians?
Does the image we like to give of the church describe what we hope to be, rather than what we are actually doing? Are there areas where we need to be more honest with ourselves?

2 Corinthians 3:1-6 Letters from Christ

- v.1 *letters of recommendation – some travelling teachers based their authority on references from others; here Paul says that his message and its effects provides its own evidence of its validity*
- v.2 *you yourselves are our letter – Paul warmly points to the evidence of spiritual life in Corinth*
- v.5 *our competence comes from God – whilst pointing to the church in Corinth as evidence of the validity of his ministry, Paul is keen that the credit should go to God alone.*
- v.6 *ministers of a new covenant – Paul is probably emphasizing the power of the Spirit to those Gentile Christians at Corinth who were tempted to follow Jewish-Christian teachers who said they must observe all of the written Jewish Law, although it could never bring them spiritual freedom. Paul is echoing Jeremiah 31:31-34.*
3. If our church too is a 'letter', what message is it giving to the place where we live? What evidence can we see around us of God's Spirit at work in people's lives and in the community around us?

Matthew 5:13-16 - Salt and Light

- v.13 *salt – primarily, to preserve food from going bad in the days before refrigeration; also for flavour*
- v.13 *loses its saltiness – pure sodium chloride cannot 'lose its saltiness' but there are mixed deposits on the shores of the Dead Sea from which the useful sodium chloride could be washed out, leaving a useless remnant of other minerals that might look like salt but have none of its valuable properties. Pure salt can also be contaminated by other minerals to produce substances that are dangerous.*
- v.14 *the light of the world: as Jesus said of himself in John 8:12, light to show the way in the darkness.*
- v.16 *good deeds – attractive lives, as well as morally good. See also John 15:8, Ephesians 2:8-10.*
4. Salt was valuable for two reasons in Jesus' time: to preserve food, and to enhance its flavour. How can we perform similar functions in our society, as a 'moral disinfectant' & to 'improve the atmosphere'? How can we be 'salt' at home, at work, amongst our neighbours, in our leisure – by what we do or what we don't join in; by what we say or don't say; by how we spend our time and money...? How can our growth group and what we do in church, and as a church, help us to do this?
 5. Where does our 'light' come from? What is the purpose of light? (*show up darkness, find the way....*) How in practice do we let our light shine? Words, or actions, or both? As a *city*, or as a *lamp*? What part does evangelism, spreading the message of Jesus, play in being 'the light of the world'? How do we ensure that people 'praise our Father in heaven' rather than taking the credit ourselves?

Being Good News

6. Today's Bible passages have used four pictures of what is involved in being Good News:
a fragrance a letter/reference a light salt
Which picture have you found most helpful... challenging.... provocative?