



**- Beyond -**

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*A resource for doing church outside, with others.*

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# Beyond

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**Beyond** our church buildings, beyond the four walls within which our worship is regularly conducted, are streets, parks, housing estates, city centres, residential areas, country parks and countryside. These are all spaces we inhabit in our everyday lives - but *not* for worship. We've become so used to singing, praying, reading, reflecting and going about the business of 'spiritual formation' *inside*, that we rarely – if ever – imagine what church beyond the building could look like.

Christian worship and formation have become associated with sitting in rows, facing forward, passive listening, and being quiet (most of the time). We listen to the people 'up front' doing the talking and rarely get to raise questions or make a contribution of our own. It seems a far cry from the walking-and-talking kind of discipleship Jesus did with his disciples all those years ago.

As a roaming preacher and prophet, Jesus' mission *compelled* him to keep moving from one place to another. While he walked *alongside* his companions, they no doubt laughed and joked, shared stories, asked questions and reflected together - and thus, Jesus - almost covertly - disciplined his disciples!

Psychologists say that 'sideways listening' is what we do when we walk or work *alongside* someone - instead of the more intense practice of talking and listening face to face. Sideways talking/listening requires less eye contact and is therefore, less threatening. In other words, we tend to be more relaxed and receptive when we relate to others *alongside* rather than face on!

And so we've been wondering lately – as we reflect on the example of Jesus and the disciples (and with our building remaining essentially closed) what church **beyond** the building could look like? Could we cultivate a way of doing church that enables us to walk, worship and wonder side-by-side - learning from each other? Could we use this time when we can't use our buildings – to rediscover connecting with God, one another and the planet – *out there* – in the world **beyond** the building?

## **A Different Way**

In the coming months when we may not be able meet in our church building we're proposing experimenting with a different way of worshipping. We're proposing that a couple of households (not necessarily 'families') arrange to meet – at a park or near to where they live - to practice 'sideways' or

side-by-side discipleship where the emphasis is on shared learning and relationship building.

**Beyond** is about:

- **Building relationships** – connecting with a few people face to face (but at a distance)
- **Exploring a different dynamic** - *outside* your senses will be engaged in a different way
- **Promoting good mental & physical health** - worshipping while you walk promotes overall well-being
- **Facilitating different learning styles** – the idea is to learn from each other, giving everyone the opportunity to contribute
- **Affirming our connection with the planet** – when we worship ‘out there’ we’re more likely to be mindful of the planet and our role as stewards

We have devised our own **Beyond** material to link in with St Mark’s summer series on *Sharing Stories*, but we also recommend other ‘outdoor church’ resources (below) that you may prefer to use – either way, we would like to encourage those who can (weather permitting) to meet together to worship –while-you-walk...

Outdoor Church – 20 Sessions to Take Church Outside the Building for Children & Families by Sally Welch (BRF, 2016)

Outdoor Worship – Engage with God in his creation by Sara and Sam Hargreaves (engageworship.org)

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As you meet with friends and fellow disciples today – to walk and talk – you may want to incorporate some of the suggestions below to give your walk some structure and direction – especially if you also want to engage with our summer theme on *the stories Jesus told*.

Feel free to adapt the ideas below – adding a psalm or a collect – if that's your tradition. Also incorporate more silence if your intention is more contemplative. If there are children and young people in your group you may want *less* structure, more fluidity...

## Before you begin...

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- Decide on whether you're going for a more 'play it by ear' approach or would prefer something more structured
- Choose the material you want to use for your walk and make sure everyone has what they need in terms of readings & prayers
- Elect someone to 'lead' if necessary
- Use the time outside to connect with your senses enjoy your surroundings
- Allow plenty of time to hear from each other and embrace different perspectives

### **Safety considerations**

- **Remember that in some cases the distance rule will still apply**
  - **Please be mindful not to pass resources or equipment around but ensure that everyone brings what they need with them – and takes them home again**
  - **Arrange for someone to bring a first-aid kit, tissues and hand sanitizer**
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# Sharing Stories

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We hope that a **fresh look** at the stories Jesus told will facilitate a **fresh appreciation** for the parables and will lead to fruitful discipleship as we seek to follow Jesus faithfully in unsettling times. Below are the parables we'll be reflecting on over the summer: 5th July – 6<sup>th</sup> September

- **The wise and foolish builders** Matt 7: 24 - 29
- **The workers in the vineyard** Matt 20: 1 – 16
- **The parable of the sower** Luke 8: 1 – 15
- **The parable of the party** Luke 14: 1 - 23
- **The unforgiving servant** Matt 18: 21 - 35
- **The good Samaritan** Luke 10: 25 - 37
- **The prodigal son** Luke 15: 11 - 32
- **The story of Lazarus** Luke 16: 19 - 31
- **The good shepherd** John 10: 1 - 18
- **The friend at night** Luke 11: 5 - 8

## **Begin**

Before you set off, take in your surroundings and the sensation of being connected to the world around you. Take a deep breath. Acknowledge God's presence *sustaining* the world and become aware of his presence.

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Psalm 19:1-4:*

### **Own up**

Recognise those times this past week when you've failed to live and love as you ought to. Use the action of breathing out – expelling air – to breathe out those things you're ashamed of, or those things you need to let go of.

Remember St Paul's words, "It is for freedom, that Christ has set you free" and allow that profound truth to put a spring in your step as you stride out forgiven and free!

### **Catch-up**

Start walking and just spend some time catching up with one another.

### **Pause & pray**

When you want a short break – a breather - invite someone to pray:

*Loving God, walk with us as we walk today; talk to us through the stories we share, the word we hear and the questions we ponder. Shape us today as you shaped your disciples – walking and talking together. Amen*

Feel free to take a moment just to be still and enjoy some silence together (if appropriate).

### **Share stories**

Continue walking and as you walk invite one of two people to share a story:

It could be a story from their own lives – something that’s actually happened to them – poignant or funny - or they might want to simply recount a favourite story from a book or movie that is meaningful to them.

Listen carefully and then ask them to explain why that story is significant to them?

### **A Story Jesus told**

When it seems right to stop for another break, ask someone to read this week’s parable – a story *Jesus* told. If you are a group with young children you may want to read from Nick Butterworth’s *The Stories Jesus Told* illustrated story book, equally *The Message* version of the Bible would bring a fresh perspective to familiar stories.

## Reflection

As you continue walking allow the conversation to centre on the parable you've just heard – use the questions below if they would help:

- What did you make of the story? What caught your attention? What amused or moved you? What troubled or disturbed you?
- What issue do you think Jesus was addressing by telling this story?
- What was Jesus trying to provoke his listeners in to doing or not doing?
- How does this story fit with the rest of Jesus' life and mission? Does it seem consistent? How does it help us to understand Jesus' mission?
- Is the parable about the Kingdom of God? God's character? What it means to be a disciple? Or something else?
- How did this parable challenge your understanding of what it means to be a 'follower of Jesus'?

- How does this parable speak to you?
- Was there an 'invitation' in the parable? What might Jesus be inviting us to do today?
- Many of Jesus' stories are about the Kingdom of God - what does a vision of God's will being done 'on earth as in heaven' look like in your life? Can you think of an example?
- 'On earth as in heaven' seems to be the crux of Jesus' teaching and mission. It's also something we pray when we pray the Lord's Prayer. What does 'on earth as in heaven' mean to you?
- What might you do/think differently after reflecting on the story Jesus told?

### **Pause & pray**

As your conversation about the parable naturally draws to a close, you may want to encourage a time of silent reflection and prayer (particularly about anything arising from your conversation) or you may want to invite someone to lead you in praying *The Lord's Prayer*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and forever.  
Amen.

## Afterwards...

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- Reflect on how doing church *outside* changed the dynamic of worship? How did your surroundings inform how you prayed, what you talked about and how you engaged with one another?

- What did you learn from each other – young and old?  
What insights or experiences did others bring to the conversation that you particularly appreciated?
- How can you be praying for, and supporting, one another this week?
- How can you keep the conversation going as you continue to reflect on each other's stories and the stories Jesus told?