

BACK TO THE BASICS



AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT SANCTUARY AND WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO



RADICAL WELCOME!

Darryl Reckman

At the birth of Jesus all the wrong people were invited.

To begin, we have Mary, the mother of Jesus, a scared yet brave peasant girl of about 13 years old. That seems to be the main point about Mary! Yet, we seem to get sidetracked by Mary's experience with God in creating the baby. Our English translations use the word "virgin" but could have easily have chosen the expression "young girl." Matthew's Greek word 'parthenos' in Matthew 1:23, refers to the word in Isaiah's Hebrew 'almah', from Isaiah 7:14. This word simply means "young woman of marriageable age", without any reference to sexual purity, as opposed to the Hebrew 'bethulah', which does explicitly mean virgin, which is used elsewhere in scripture, but never in reference to the coming of the Messiah.

(continued on following page)

Join us for our Annual Christmas Party Wednesday December 19th, 2-10pm (dinner @ 5:30)

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER:

You may find that the stories in this newsletter are a little more 'theologically thick' than you are used to reading from us. But the truth is that we think about all of this stuff, theology and why we do what we do, all the time! It's what drives us. We believe very strongly that caring for the poor and standing up for other social justice issues is an important expression of our theology, and *THE* way to follow Jesus in our world today.

RADICAL.....

Continued from previous page

I do not intend to argue for or against Immaculate Conception. But if Mary was just a young girl, does it make her story any less remarkable? Absolutely not! Without a doubt, God's hand was upon her. The point that the scriptures are trying to make here is not whether she had ever had sex, but rather to emphasize that she was a woman of little means, liable to be stoned to death because of her situation. She was an embarrassment to herself and to Joseph, her fiancé. She was likely terrified, but trusted that God was with her and that He had a bigger and much better plan for her life and for the life of her child. God was with her.

Just a reminder that all of the names and identifying information in the stories of this newsletter have been changed to protect the people in our community.

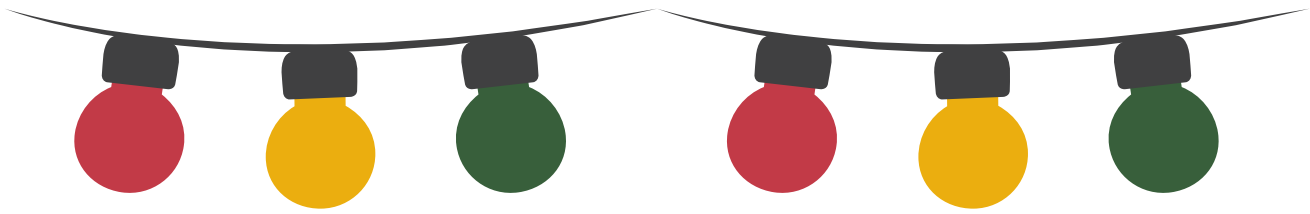
Then there are the shepherds. These men were dirty. Unqualified for any other vocation. Dismissed by society. Untrustworthy. Their statements could not be held up in a court of law. They were a little higher than the animals they cared for, but still less than human. At least that's how they were treated. These are the people God chose to announce the birth of His Son to first.

Finally we have the 'wise men from the East'. The extravagance of their gifts demonstrates that these were men of distinguish and honour for sure. But they were not from Israel. They were not part of the blessed people of God. How could these outsiders possibly be welcomed into the celebration of the arrival of the long foretold One?

From the very beginning, God inaugurated a radical welcome into His family for all sorts of people who were marginalized and excluded for all sorts of reasons. Jesus not only welcomes all of us (and by ALL, He really, actually meant ALL of us), but he particularly welcomes those who are most often unwelcome by the rest of the world.

For this reason, at Sanctuary we practice a radical welcome for anyone and everyone who is looking for a place to belong. We desire to share meals with these people, and according to Mediterranean tradition, in so doing, we declare that we are family, together with them. No longer being 'us' and 'them'. Just us. Justice. -DR





WORSHIP: WORTH-SHIP

Tessa Buckley

Worship: To give honour to. Acknowledgement of worth. Worth-ship.

At our Sunday afternoon services at Sanctuary, we are often challenged to live out Christ's call to true worship. Many of us know in our hearts that worship should be much more than a Sunday experience, but we often get stuck on the Sunday event of church. Perhaps this is because understanding true worship means that it should affect everything and every day.

Worship is how we spend our time and money. It's who we can relax with. It's how we love the people we can't relax with. It's taking care of the widows and orphans, the sick, and the vulnerable. It's not just a task to complete but a life lived. Sunday "worship" gatherings are important then for two reasons. First, we gather to be reminded/encouraged that all life is worship. And second, we gather to share the pain and the joy corporately of that lifestyle of worship. At Sanctuary, we strive to continuously reflect on how to incorporate these beliefs into how we structure and worship together during Sunday afternoon service.

Our Sunday symbols may not be what you expect. We want to symbolically demonstrate that we are each giving up power in love. So, we sit in a circle as a symbol of unity with no one person standing higher than the other. Our speaker and our worship team sit right in that circle. We have a microphone in the middle for anyone to reach for. Everyone is welcome share what is on their hearts. We reflect on our week and encourage one another to share where we have seen God's Kingdom at work. Many times it is in painful ways, mixed in with beauty and joy, creating a messy masterpiece of worth-ship to God. It makes us stop and think about how we are using our time and in that, we recognize God at work in our daily lives. We don't pre-plan all our songs, instead we let the community choose the songs they wish to worship to.



Every Sunday we take communion together. The elements sit on the table in the centre of our circle for the duration of our service. In taking communion, even the children partake, finishing off what is left at the end! Our daily need for the Body and Blood of Christ given for us, served to each other from person to person, as the Priesthood of all believers, is a reminder to offer ourselves as He did for the sake of the other.

Each week we meet, not because it is our main act of worship, but as another symbol and expression of our lifestyle of Worship to Him. As a worship "leader" in this context, it has been a challenge to lay down the need to have a framework and timeline. I fear messing up! So, I am still learning. In the end, I remember Jesus. His time with others. The messiness of his love. And we press on. To grow in worship together. To learn to worship with our whole lives. -TB

SALVATION, SIN, THE GOSPEL, JESUS... ...AND SANCTUARY

Gil Clelland

“Why did my life turn out like this? Is this who I am?” Roger stares down at the floor, fidgets with his pant leg some more, and glances up at me. On the seventh floor of Victoria Hospital after an overwhelming few days with his mental illness, Roger begins to share his childhood with me. Mom was rarely home. She had a “great job...and that meant I saw her for a few minutes in the evening. And some weekends. When she wasn't travelling.” Dad was absent after a bitter divorce. They had money. But no one was home. Roger and his sister, younger by less than two years, fought all the time. “Rarely physical. A lot of yelling.” School was never a place Roger felt welcomed. Problems with the law started in his teen years. “Yeah, I hate the cops. They're always out to get me.” In and out of jail for twenty years, an addiction began to cover the pain, and still holds. Since 2016, he's been living in London trying to get by. Not many friends. “Except you... and a few others.” Counselling and addiction services help for a short time. “I've never made it past 8 months clean. For over 20 years...Is this my life, Gil?” Roger picks at his pants a little more. Face down to hide the tears from me. The streets teach you to never show you are weak.

So, how does the Gospel meet Roger and so many others we know?

The Gospel, good news, as revealed in the New Testament is that Jesus as Israel's Anointed One (from the Hebrew word Messiah - translated as Christos in Greek and transliterated as Christ in English) inaugurated the reign of the Israel's God YHWH over the whole earth USING the methodologies of Jesus. Filled with God's spirit, Jesus lived a life that embodied Israel's calling, died by maintaining that calling, and rose again as a declaration that the even though that calling will cost everything, YHWH would have final verdict and determine that it was a true just life.

As Anointed One, Jesus offered God's forgiveness for sin. According to the prophets, sin was missing the mark of the call to be the people of Israel. To be God's people meant they had to DO something, specifically to bless others with the blessing they received (Genesis 12). Since Israel had received God's blessings of land, God's presence in Temple, the Spirit, and the Torah, those gifts could not be wasted. They needed to be shared. The prophets regularly spoke out against holding back justice from all people - missing the mark of being Israel. When they missed that mark, it was because their hearts were not in the right place - idolatry. The impact of this sin was most evident among the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the “alien among us”. Sin was found in individuals, communities, and structures upheld by people.

The sin of Israel was costly. As punishment for their sins, YHWH banished Israel from God's presence and good gifts to the place of exile in a foreign land. There, Israel would be reminded that God should be the centre of their worship. And from that worship of the One True God, Israel would hear the heartbeat of God for the poor and oppressed. The prophet declared that when the people worshipped correctly in Israel, justice followed, especially for the most ostracized (Isaiah 58). Israel began longing for the day of return from exile - sins would be forgiven, their Temple rebuilt or restored, dry bones would become flesh, and YHWH would return to Zion. Yet, it was not to be. In their return to the land, they sensed the continued oppression by overlords. The important yet brief victory less than 200 years before Jesus by Judas Maccabeus over the Seleucid Empire (from which we get Hanukkah) only demonstrates that the Israelites felt that God had not ended the exile and restored Israel's place. When the Roman occupation began, unrest grew even more. Hadn't the prophets promised that in 70 x 7 years, Israel's fortunes would change? Shouldn't God's people be shown to be so? The Romans knew terrible ways to demonstrate their Emperor was the true Saviour of the world, the bringer of Pax Romana, and the World's true Lord - Caesar. Rome brought peace through Victory! It was the ultimate demonstration of the power of death. After the village of Sepphoris was destroyed by the Romans and rebuilt with a population that was loyal to Rome, a young builder by the name of Jesus (who likely worked in the rebuilding of Sepphoris) began to share his message of good news. (continued on following page)

SALVATION.....

Continued from previous page

A new era had begun. But not in the way anyone was expecting. Sins were forgiven so that the people of God could exchange their lived out narrative of nationalistic pride and exclusion (*repent*) for Jesus' narrative of radical inclusion and tribal barrier breaking (*believe*). Jesus revealed that love was the centre of the Torah of the heart. Love was not comfortable. It meant that everyone had enough. Long lost "family members" needed to be welcomed back the way their Father had done so already! And the celebration of jubilee - a return of goods, lands, and property to ensure that no one had a hold over another. And everyone had enough. Ensuring everyone had enough meant challenging those who took too much or maintained oppression over others. To do this, Jesus and his followers radically welcomed the ones most impacted by oppression calling them the "blessed" ones. Oppressors responded the way they always do when challenged. They killed those who stood in their way. But YHWH's reign revealed in Jesus would not be like the Kingdoms of this world. Jesus and his followers would not fight back with violence. Instead, YHWH offered resurrection to those who followed this new Way. And leading the Way, embodying YHWH's return to Zion, was a humble man on a donkey, not a victorious king on a warhorse. Dying first for this Kingdom. Rising first to show it is the Way. Peace through justice. Salvation from the false narratives and false worship to the counter-Imperial narrative of love, inclusion, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. The people were taught to pray that God would reign on earth as God already reigned in Heaven. None of this was possible on their own. God's very presence, the Spirit of God, would fill anyone who followed this Jesus in this Way.

Jesus wanted others to follow this Way, this method, this Kingdom. "In the same way and methods the Father sent me, so I send you. Receive now the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21, my translation). At Sanctuary, that is what we are trying to do. We have heard a calling by God to be among those most impacted by oppression. To challenge the structures and people who maintain this oppression. To share the radical love of Jesus with people who know little about love, home, or welcome. To invite and not coerce anyone to hear about Jesus. And find home together. It is here that I am also welcomed by the "blessed" ones. I too can be broken and messy. I too can find home. I meet Jesus in these people, my friends, more than I share Jesus with them! This is the Gospel. Not the social gospel. The Gospel: Jesus inaugurated the reign of YHWH over the earth using the methods of Jesus. We know we don't get it right all the time. We're learning more as we go. We know it can and will get better. Greater challenge to oppressive systems. More housing. Better understanding of the impact of trauma. More inclusion of other people groups. But, we believe this is the life we are called to live. For Roger. For me. For so many others that I call my friends, we live this life together. And in doing so, we meet Jesus. -GC



THE EXPANDING TABLE

Breezey Allen

In my house growing up, our expandable dinner table was the centre of our home. With six of us in the family and up to six more foster children joining us for a meal, we needed a table that could expand from a table of four to a large cozy table of twelve! No matter how much the house was buzzing throughout the day, we all settled back at the table for family dinner. In addition, we offered room at our table for anyone who lacked family of their own. Sitting around an ever expanding table, eating together was one of the best ways to bring our (ever expanding) family closer together. At Sanctuary, we do the same thing!

Every Wednesday at Sanctuary, the doors open at 2 pm, and until dinner time at 5:30, our friends trickle in. Some we've known for years, some are new faces. Tables fill up and noise levels rise as games are played, people catch up, and time is spent together in community. Dinner is served and everyone sits together. Darryl or Gil pray for the meal (much like my father did before our family meals) and we share it as a family. We are blessed with a large enough space that we can accommodate up to 250 people—which is necessary for our Christmas meal. We always seem to have enough! If you ever want to experience for yourself the loaves and the fishes story play out, come to Sanctuary for a meal. In spite of my (weekly) nerves that we won't have enough, somehow, we end up with leftovers.



Sanctuary was built on the belief that you need to address poverty through relationship. You can give someone a house and food but without relationships in community that person may not flourish. We've learned this along the way. We used to make food, offer it to folks, fill their stomachs, and send them along with only a word of blessing. We realized that we weren't actually investing anything into people themselves. So, we changed. We eat together - staff, volunteers, and all of our folks. We call our folks our "friends" not "clients" and try to live out the difference. It is more difficult for sure. I think it's worth it. When we get to know someone beyond a passing 'hey how are you', we begin to walk alongside them and carry their burdens with them. And they carry our burdens too! Jesus began this tradition of inviting everyone to the table. He broke bread with tax collectors, spent time with prostitutes, lepers and the Samaritan women. He gave the incredible gift of His time to each of these people. Jesus gave it willingly and lovingly—not just to the people of the temple, but to those who were most outcast, ostracized, or oppressed. Not only that, Jesus met folks in their space, their homes! To ensure we would do the same, Jesus said that when we go and find the "least of these", that is where we will find Him. We like to think that we bring Jesus to our friends. Jesus highlighted that he's already there! This is why we spend so much time on the streets, sharing table fellowship with folks in their space as well as ours!

We invite you, regardless of your situation, to the Sanctuary table. Sanctuary is not solely for those who are going through financial hardships. Sanctuary is a place for the broken of spirit, those who have felt stepped on elsewhere, who have lost family, who feel alone, who feel disregarded by society, and who are tired of living in judgement. Let's come find home together. We have an ever expanding table and we will make room for you! -BA

REMEMBERING BENJAMIN

While adding the finishing touches to this newsletter yesterday, Gil came into my office to share news that he had just heard of the passing of our dear friend Benjamin. He was struck by a vehicle late at night while crossing a busy intersection.

Yesterday was Wednesday, and I am thankful that we were able to hurt and reminisce with the community at drop-in.

This morning the feeling is surreal.

Benjamin was a pain for sure. He loved to joke, and push buttons and never ever stop. But every moment with him was a gift. He taught us all many things including perseverance, patience, humility, and how to have humour in tough times.

He loved extravagantly and received love well. Always looking for moments of intimacy, and willing to ask the hard questions. Life was not easy for him from the very beginning, but he found a way to get up and face each day with grace and determination.

Thanks Benjamin... for everything. We'll see you on the otherside. -DR

Oh Holy
Night!

“

I didn't really know much about him, except I do remember a few years back when he sang Ave Maria at the Christmas Party... It really got to me.

-Chris





YEAR-END DONATIONS

As we come to the close of the year, we are reminded of the fact that we are totally dependant on our community of supporters. Please consider Sanctuary in your year-end giving. All donations will receive a charitable receipt for income tax purposes.

We have big dreams for 2019, including hiring another staff member to expand our street-outreach, but this is only possible through your generosity.

Thank you for your support!



From all of us at Sanctuary London,

Merry Christmas