

November 27th - Jesus

Pray.

I want you to imagine that you've fallen into a pit. Its deep and dark, the floor is muddy, the sides are steep & slippery, with sharp rocks sticking out.
You are stuck & dirty and hurt.

Along comes a man - who looks over the edge and sees you down there.
You stupid fool, what are you doing down there? - Didn't you see the pit? that's a daft thing to do to fall in there. - I guess you'll learn to be more careful and not so stupid in the future.

and walks off.

A woman comes along & sees you.
Oh no dear, I'm sorry to see you down there. That looks horrible. Let me just get you something. - She comes back a few minutes later and starts passing you books. This is called 'Pits and how to get out of them.' This is called - rising up out of the dirt. This one is - rope ladders, how to make them when you're in trouble. This one is an inspiring story of someone who fell into a pit & climbed out, you should read it. This is called 'top 10 tips for climbing'

and then she walks off.

A third person turns up. - Oh no, I'm so sorry, you're in a pit.
And jumps in with you, gives you a hug, listens to you tell them how horrible the pit is...
But then realises that you're both stuck in the pit. - with no way out.

Finally someone comes, attaches a ladder to the side of the pit, comes down and lifts you up & carries you up, out of the pit.

As we begin to think about Christmas. (Advent candle)
I wonder which of those helpers do you think of God as?

One of my favourites writers, the former Bishop of Durham - Tom Wright says this.
When people tell me that they don't believe in God. I ask them to tell me about the god they don't believe in. When they've described him 10times out of 10 I surprise them and say that I don't believe in that god either.

What we believe about God will effect how much we let Him be a part of our lives.

If we see God as distant, or disinterested and walking past - just judging us or hoping that we'll learn from our suffering.
(or in some cases people believe He pushed them in the pit in the first place!)
Then we probably won't want to have much to do with him.

If we think that he walks past us and just throws books and tips and advice at us. - Then we'll sometimes want to check in with him & learn a bit. - But won't really want to get to know him, or spend time praying with Him.

The wonderful news I want us to think about this morning is that Christmas reveals that Jesus is like the last of our 4 helpers.

God doesn't stand on the edge of the pit we're in & shout down to us.

He comes down to live amongst us & get to know us.

In the Bible after the story of an angel visiting Mary to promise that Jesus will be born, Matthew writes;

And his name shall be called 'Immanuel' - which means God with us.

Jesus is God. - He shows us what God is like. & I want to look at some ways he shows us that he's like our 4th helper.

1. Jesus cares.

In Matthew 8 - we have a series of healing stories.

First of all - the leper, then the Centurion's servant, and thirdly Peter's Mother-in-law.

(I've always thought anyone who heals a Mother-in-law, must have lots of grace & compassion!!)

In each case - Jesus doesn't just show his power to heal - he shows love.

He sees Peter's MOther-in-law in bed, sick with a fever and immediately reaches out to her to heal her.

Jesus is the one who makes the first move.

He's the one who reaches out and comes to where we are.

Before I trained for ordination, I worked in Central Asia in a country that was officially secular, but had been historically a Muslim country.

My team leader's neighbour came to him one day and asked him if he had a copy of his 'Holy book'. - Seeing a wonderful opportunity to share Jesus with her, but being careful because of security and spies. They invited her in to drink tea and talk.

Before they moved to her street, she had never met someone from the West before.

She shared how the previous week she had a dream in which Jesus appeared to her. He told her to read his holy book. - So she had got hold of a copy of the holy book from her family's background & read it.

The next night Jesus appeared to her again and said. - "No, not that book, read my holy book'. So that's why she came to see my friends.

They gave her a copy and within days she came to know Jesus personally.

Its just one story of someone known to me, who has experienced Jesus coming to them to rescue them. - All of us here today, wherever we are in relationship to God - are here I believe because Jesus is reaching out to us - to welcome us to know him better.

2. He is humble.

That's an amazing thing to say about God isn't it - That he's humble.

But lets look at Philippians 2

re-read it.

I mentioned this passage last week, but wanted to look at it again.

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Its the amazing downward journey that Jesus took.

Though he was God. - He lowered himself.
He didn't grasp at being God. - But came down and became like us.
He became a servant - Even though he is God!!

This is such an amazing truth about God.

When humans have made religions - God has always been far off.
Always been huge and powerful and superior to us.
God has been a higher power.
He is higher & greater & more powerful. - Of course.

But the way he relates to us, is that he empties himself of that & becomes like us!!!

This is a wonderful thing about Jesus. - He is so **humble**.

The Genesis we have the story of 'the fall' - The moment when Adam and Eve ate the apple -
because they wanted to be like God.
They tried to grasp at equality with God. - To lift themselves up higher into more power.

To put that right - Jesus did the opposite.
He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped - but made himself nothing...

At Christmas we see that begin. - He was born to poor parents in a stable as a helpless baby.

Because he's humble - it means its easier for us to talk to him.

I find talking to really proud people quite a painful experience.
They always have to know best & prove it.
Do you like being talked down to? - told that you've got it wrong, or made to feel small or
stupid.

Jesus doesn't do that.

Those who came to him proud - he made them look stupid, by revealing their pride.
But those who came to him for help - He was kind and humble.

[9.15 service - in Matt 8. - between our two stories a Roman Centurion comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his servant.

What's so lovely about the whole story is that the Centurion and Jesus both speak and relate to one another with such humility]

And so the next thing we see about Jesus.

He came to earth, not to condemn the world, but to save it.

It says in John 3.17

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

We can sometimes feel that we need to hide from God, because we feel dirty and ashamed of what we've done.

When we see God as the big judge up in the SKY, who wants to punish us, to smite us.

[powerpoint]

But what he reveals to us in Jesus - is that he loves us and comes to rescue us & not condemn or judge us.

God isn't sitting in heaven waiting for you to make a mistake.

[Some of you are visiting church today, maybe for the first time & I wonder how it felt to arrive today? - how do you feel God reacts to you?

Does part of you want to run away from Him, because you feel ashamed of things in your life?

The wonderful thing we see about Jesus - was that he didn't judge or condemn anyone, except those who thought they were righteous & better than others.

He came to help us - not judge us.

And that takes us onto our next characteristic of Jesus.

4. He doesn't mind getting dirty.

When I was a boy, my sister went to her friend David's birthday party.

David's family, lived in a very nice house and we all knew that his Mum kept her house totally immaculate.

I can still remember the shock we all felt when we heard what happened at the party. The week before the party, she had a brand new white carpet fitted in her sitting room... Yes you've guessed it. - In the midst of the party one of the boys had walked in there with a full glass of Ribena & spilt that whole glass all over the middle of the brand new white carpet!!

its safe to say the party didn't recover from that moment!

Sometimes we can feel that God is the 'white carpet God'. - Keeping heaven pristine and clean and that we dirty sinners aren't really allowed in - unless we make a mess of it.

That's not what we see in Jesus - He didn't push away dirty sinners - He embraced them,

In our reading Matthew 8.1-3 we heard of Jesus healing a leper.
Did you see how he did it?

v3 - Jesus stretched out a hand and touched him, saying 'I will, be clean'.

In that culture, lepers were unclean - that meant they had to live separately from everyone else. - They were excluded from the temple & no one could touch them.

According to Old Testament laws, if you touched a leper, you were unclean & couldn't go around in public or go to the temple for 7 days.

The belief was that if you touched a leper - then their uncleanness would infect you. (It was originally a health and safety concern - which became a law)
What does Jesus do?

he touched the leper.

Let me demonstrate what's going on here. -
volunteer.

Under the law; -
The uncleanness, the sickness in the leper would be transmitted from him to Jesus, making Jesus unclean.

But what if the transfer the other way is more powerful? - If the flow from Jesus to the leper is stronger - then the life in Jesus flows out from him. - To make the leper clean.

That's what happened. - Jesus passed on cleanness, acceptance, life - healing - into the leper & he was healed.

Jesus doesn't push away dirty people. - He embraces them.
Because the life in him - is more powerful than our failures, mistakes, mess.

Some of us here today may feel unclean, feel that we've done so much that's wrong.
Feel that Jesus will push us away, criticise us - Shun us.

But what we see here - is that He reaches out and touches those who are unclean.
And makes them clean.

Which brings me to my final point about Jesus.

His love brings change.

Like our 4th helper in the pit.
Jesus doesn't just come and join us in the dirt - He has a way to lift us out.

When he touched the leper he was clean.
When he touched Peter's mother-in-law's hand - the fever left her and she got up.

He is the one who brings change & restores us.

This is the amazing truth about the Love of God. - It doesn't leave us as we are. - It transforms us, it brings us life.

and the reason is that - it takes away the mess and dirt that we're in.

In Philippians 2 we read of Jesus humbling himself to death, even death on a cross.

When Jesus touched the leper and the Moth-in-law, - he gave them life, which overcame the sickness in their bodies.

But when he died, the mess and the pain and the dirt of our lives - went into his body.

It says in 1 Peter 2.24 -

He himself
bore our sins in his body on the tree,
so that we might die to sins
and live for righteousness
by his wounds you have been healed

What this is saying - is that when Jesus died on the Cross.

He absorbed all our dirt and mess into himself.

He soaked it all up. - and then when he died. - It was all dealt with.

That means - he can make us clean and new, - in exchange for the dirt and mess we feel that we carry around.

Its simply a case of coming to Jesus and asking him to make us clean.

As the leper says to Jesus - *If you are willing you can make me clean.*

I know that I often need to pray that prayer. -

Jesus if you're willing, you can make me clean.

and the wonderful thing - is that he does. - He doesn't judge us, advise us, or just join us in the dirt.

he comes to embrace us & then lift us out.

- response.