

REFLECTIONS FOR TEAM MEMBERS AND LEADERS

Love is Creative

Genesis 1:1-31

<http://bit.ly/40Hekk6>

And love is..... Let there be light!

The first (probably priestly) account of Creation always reminds me of Mickey Mouse as the sorcerer's apprentice in the film *Fantasia*. In my mind's eye I see a figure standing in the middle of celestial fireworks, orchestrating the beginning of creation like a conductor of an orchestra bringing a creation into being from nothing.

One of the things we often struggle with is the question, "Why did God bother at all? Why did the being who creates everything need to be bothered to bring such frustrating beings into existence? Certainly, if we read the soap opera we call the rest of Genesis, we aren't painted in a particularly positive light. And that makes us sometimes feel a little less than wonderful about ourselves.

But that would be to ignore what God has created in us. We are beings capable of incredible creativity and love. The fact that you are sitting reading this holiday club document is a testament to thousands of minds dreaming, inventing and creating everything from paper to microchips – and that's before the team even got together to think up this programme. These things are not an accident. Our creativity is part of the Creator's love. And we were created in love to create.

So when using this guide, trust this gift. Don't rely on being safe and predictable. Take a risk to do something a little bit out of your comfort zone. Listen to that creative spark in you that is part of the spark from the very beginning of creation. Let your creativity and imagination soar!

Things to ponder

- What is your spark from the beginning of creation – how can you fan it into a flame?
- Having leafed through the booklet, what has fired your imagination? What holds us back from being creative – what gets in the way of us trusting ourselves?
- What holds you back from being creative – what gets in the way of you trusting yourself?

Prayer



Take some time together to pray together at the beginning of the week. Pray about how you can create a safe space for creativity to flourish, both in the delivery team and also in the sessions with the young people.

Love is Brave

Matthew 14:22-33

<http://bit.ly/439liQD>

I think sometimes it is surprising that we can do anything at all post-pandemic in our churches. Covid disrupted so much. Many people put things down they have never taken back up. Some found two years of stasis has made them lose their confidence in their physical and mental abilities. Other people lost that Sunday morning habit and now go for a walk or do brunch. We lost wonderful irreplaceable people to the ravages of pandemic. The sad truth is that some congregations will never recover, and some have closed and more will close.

There has been a permanent disruption and things will never settle back to where they were before. I hate the term "new normal". Principally because it implies we should stop whining and get on with it.

But sometimes there is a point to our whining.

One reason may be fear. When we are afraid, we find all sorts of reasons not to go forward. And ignoring those fears simply means that they linger on rather than being dealt with.

And we need to face down our fears to move onwards.

Imagine Peter first of all thinking that he was seeing a ghost and then later starting to sink because he was afraid and crying, "Save me Lord". I suspect we all feel like that sometimes.

If you are not afraid, there is no occasion to exhibit bravery. Bravery means facing down our fears and acting anyway. Not noticing danger isn't bravery – it's inattention. And in our current situations facing our fears may be as daunting to us as it was to Peter.

But if we don't take a risk will anything ever change in a positive way?

Things to ponder

- What are the fears current in your own church community?
- How can you deal with these fears positively while still acknowledging their impact?
- How might your fears impact on this week and what you deliver as a team?

Prayer



Sometimes, God, it feels choppy and I am afraid. Sometimes I struggle to hear you calling me over the roar of events. Help me to get out of the boat and achieve the miraculous with your help.



Love is adventure

Matthew 4:18-22 and 9:9-13

<http://bit.ly/3GmCsAh>

<http://bit.ly/3KjvkG4>

One of the exciting things about an adventure is it creates deep bonds between everyone who experiences it. We all have people we know because we have shared something special, and when we get together we reminisce about our adventure together.

I often wonder how the families of the four fishermen felt when they simply left what they were doing to embark on the adventure of their lives. I can imagine there was quite a bit of consternation and grumbling – "What do you mean that you are heading off for who knows where and who knows how long? How are we supposed to eat if you aren't catching fish?"

An adventure comes at a cost – it means we are having to abandon the known and the familiar in order to experience something different and exciting. We change because of our experiences when we adventure.

While our adventures may be a little less exciting than the disciples', we should try to have them none the less. This week is an opportunity to provide children with an adventure in faith and fun. It is also an opportunity for us to travel outside the confines of what we normally do as Church and have an adventure on our own. We have permission to do things we normally would not have time to do.

Give yourself permission to have an adventure yourself this week. You might be surprised what happens!

Things to ponder

- When was a time you had an adventure? How did it change you?
- How can you encourage each other to have an adventure this week? What permission do you need to give each other so you can?

- How has planning and running these sessions changed your relationships with each other?

Prayer



Dear God, do not let us be too timid to hear your voice and risk going on an adventure with you. Let me travel the untrodden paths where you call me.

Love is Belonging

Genesis 15:1-6

<http://bit.ly/3ZRqWnw>

I have a new puppy from a rescue centre. Our two older dogs (one ancient cavalier spaniel and a middle aged one who will need a new friend soon) have been somewhat affronted by this impertinent bundle of fur. It didn't help that the first time they snuggled together, the puppy decided to chew ears and tails! It's taken a few weeks for them to accept each other.

Belonging is when we start to see each other as having something to do with each other. It's when we begin to care about our welfare and see it as collective rather than individual. The Genesis story we read today relates to a very special family who were given a special blessing to carry to the world. And we are part of that family.

And being part of that family has obligations. It means welcoming those annoying frisky puppies into our stable relationships even when they nip our tails. It means accepting them and allowing ourselves to be reinvigorated and changed by them... as I see a somewhat middle aged portly dog playing chase'ems with a fuzzy puppy out of the window.

Hopefully you have had new people at your sessions. Of course, there are all sorts of motives why they might be there. You might

suspect this is cheap childcare or simply the opportunity during holidays to dump a child and have a harass-free cup of coffee. But that doesn't mean that the children you have received have not had an invitation to become part of our special family.

If possible, engage with the families who come as, often, people are so afraid that they will be rejected – or judged. And, like my puppy, they do not know our funny pack ways and may do the equivalent of chewing our tails. So, suspend any assumptions you may have and be open to the gifts you may receive from them – who knows, maybe this is the beginning of a wonderful relationship!

Things to ponder

- Think about how you could engage beyond this week with the families who have come. What could be possible?
- My puppy only really came out of her shell when the other dogs accepted her. What can you do to truly welcome anyone new who has come to these sessions?
- What are the things we can learn from any new families? What is the best of us we can share with them?

Prayer

As the old hymn goes:

*Bind us together
with cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord,
bind us together,
bind us together with love.*



Love is surprising

John 1:1-51

<http://bit.ly/3nST4cN>

(Note: the children's session uses the reading from Luke 1:26-38)

I recently ran a series of Bible studies about the early arguments about the nature of Jesus. The one that disturbed us the most was Docetism, the idea that Jesus only seemed to have a body and was not really incarnate (in flesh). Putting it rather simplistically, it suggested Jesus was some sort of spiritual hologram. The reason that disturbed us so much was summed up in the comment "So how would he know what it feels to be me?".

If we know Jesus laughed, cried, felt hungry, felt discouraged and even had the occasional snuffle it makes God far more approachable to us. It tells us that God knows what it is to be human. Logically, we know that of course God knows what it is to be human – she did create us after all – but sometimes it doesn't feel like that. The illusion of a majestic unapproachable God is shattered in the incarnation.

Similarly, Church can seem scarcely human. Too often, people see buildings and assume a chilly bunch of saints assemble there. Often, we shelter in them trying to create an unchanging sanctuary from a hostile world. This is your opportunity to shatter both illusions. Let yourself be a bit vulnerable and human this week. Share a bit of yourself. Be a bit like a Jesus with smelly feet and an infectious laugh. It might be the surprise that everyone needs.

Things to ponder

- What reassurance do you need to be more vulnerable to everyone involved in this week?
- What blessings can you be this week and what blessings can you receive?
- How can you embody the best of your church to those who have come this week?

Prayer



Jesus, help me to be as vulnerable and human as you were. Work through me to continue the miracle of incarnation.

