



## **Holy City Connects Launch: Week of January 14, 2018**

### **Series: *Engaging the City***

**Series overview:** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Those verses from the beginning of Genesis and the beginning of John's Gospel give us a picture of a God who creates all things good. He does everything well. That same God calls us to receive, give thanks for, and enjoy all that is good. Unfortunately, we seem to have a rather ingrown and nasty habit of exploiting the good gifts of God for our own self-serving purposes. But yet, God would have good to triumph and us to rest content in His Goodness. And so He came. He wrapped Himself in the stuff of our humanity and stepped into the messy middle of life to both affirm His love for us and to transform us and the world along the good lines of God's original creation.

John's Gospel is a rich portrayal of the unique Son of God bringing light and truth and life into the everyday troubles and events of His community. Far from preaching at the city or condemning the city or withdrawing from the city, Jesus engaged the city. He lived with and alongside real people. He celebrated. He wept. He challenged. He healed. He blessed. As the manifest presence of Christ in the world, the Church must engage our city and its people and culture the way Jesus engaged those of His day. What that might look like here in the Holy City will be the focus of our series.

#### **Week 1: Affirming our City** (HCC week)

Readings for Sunday, Jan 14: Philippians 4:4-9, John 2:1-11

#### **Week 2: Challenging Our City** (Life Group week)

Readings for Sunday, Jan 21 (Sanctity of Life Sunday): Ezekiel 22:23-31, John 2:12-25

#### **Week 3: Serving the City – GIC mission week** (HCC week)

GIC mission partners to speak at HCC groups week of Jan 29-Feb 2

#### **Week 4: Talking with our City** (Life Group week)

Readings for Sunday, Feb 4: Proverbs 8:1-11, John 3:1-21

#### **Week 5: Restoring our City** (HCC week)

Readings for Sunday, Feb 18: Isaiah 61:1-4, John 4:1-42

#### **Week 6: Comforting our City** (Life Group week)

Readings for Sunday, Feb 25: Lamentations 1:1-2, John 11:1-44

#### **Week 7: Engaging the City, a Model** (HCC week)

Readings for Sunday, Mar 4: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, John 1:14



## Week 1: Affirming our City (HCC) Readings for Sunday, Jan 14: Philippians 4:4-9, John 2:1-11

### Goal:

- God is not a killjoy, but the giver of every good and perfect gift.
- Jesus affirmed what was good in human culture and society by participating in it, celebrating it, and even encouraging it.

### Launch Questions and Opening Thoughts:

- Name some everyday things you have that can bless other people in our community.
- When giving a gift before, have you ever decided to unexpectedly give the best you could give rather than just a token gift or a sufficient gift? What happened in you? What happened in the relationship with the person you gave the gift to?
- (for the talk leader) Tell of a time when someone gave an ordinary everyday thing at just the right time that blessed you tremendously.

### Read and Discuss Passage: John 2:1-11 (print out for distribution)

- This is the account of Jesus turning water into wine
  - It was the first of his “signs” that manifested his glory.
  - As a result, we are told that the disciples believed in him.
- Jesus **celebrated** good human institutions like marriage. He went to this community event in Cana and endorsed marriage and family and community by his presence.
- Hospitality was and is huge in the Middle East. Marriage celebrations could last a week or even two. It was scandalous to run out of food or wine and not be able to provide for your guests. The couple ran out of wine, presumably near the end of the week of celebrating. Mother Mary felt their distress and appealed to her son.
  - The term for wine is the usual term for the fermented drink (as in Eph 5:18 – don’t be drunk with wine but filled with the Spirit). The whole narrative suggests the wine was alcoholic in nature. “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely [and can no longer tell the difference between expensive wine and cheap wine], then the poor wine.
  - Jesus took common household items that also symbolized the old system of relating to God through law and ritual and filled with a symbol of the Messianic Kingdom which Jesus inaugurated.
    - These were large stone jars holding water for purification – used in rites of washing and cleansing before meals and such. The text tells us that, all together, these jars held between 100 and 150 gallons of water.
    - Jesus didn’t just cover the shortage (one jar would have certainly been enough), he gave an overflowing, superabundant gift. You might say he **encouraged** the continuing of the celebration. He **endorsed** the party so to speak, affirming that such celebrations of life were good and right. He **blessed** the couple with exceeding joy rather than just saving them from losing face in the community.

- We do well to note that the wine was of a superior quality. From the perspective of the steward of the feast and the wedding guests, the **best** was saved for last. Jesus gives his best. He gives what is costly. He gives to bless others and bring joy into life in an abundant, overflowing way.

### **Questions for Buzz Groups**

- Charleston is a city in every way. It is filled with much that is good and much that is corrupt. What can Christians affirm about our city? What can we celebrate and give thanks for?
- How can we encourage these good things so that they thrive more and more?
- How can we participate in these things so as to bring God's presence (in His people) into the heart of our city and its life and culture? Where do we need to repent for withdrawing from the city and culture (living in the Christian "ghetto")?
- What resources does the Church have that we can give to the world so that it is blessed and flourishes?

### **Takeaways**

- Christ came to redeem (not condemn) the world he originally made good.
- Work, marriage, family, gardening, caretaking, exploring and classifying, eating and delighting are just a few things that were part of the original good in the world. There is much we can affirm in our city. These become the points of our engagement and participation. These are also the points where we can offer something to our city for its greater good.

### **Announcements and invitation to prayer**

#### **Prayer**

#### **Organic Connect Time**

# Life Groups

## Week 2: Challenging our City (Life Groups) Readings for Sunday, Jan 21 (Sanctity of Life Sunday): Ezekiel 22:23-31, John 2:12-25

If your Life Group wishes to make use of the current preaching series, this series flows naturally from Epiphany and encompasses our annual mission conference, the GIC (Global Impact Celebration).

From the doctrine of Creation, we learn that God made all things good and that He delighted in all that He had made. From the doctrines of Salvation, we learn that Christ came to redeem and restore, not condemn or replace. So we find ourselves as fallen creatures in a fallen world, but yet still bearing (although marred and rather disfigured) the image of God. Along with creation itself, our souls long for the freedom and full redemption that is the destiny of all who belong to Christ.

It's not Christian to hate our neighbor or to hate our city. In love we are to engage both those around us and the culture and community in which we live. There is much to celebrate and encourage. But there is also much to challenge and even resist. But even when we must stand against things in our city, we are to do so in love, praying and working for our city's redemption and flourishing.

In this week's reading from John's Gospel, we find Jesus in the traditional place of Jewish worship, affirming by his presence the goodness of worshipping God. But because of his love for his Father and for his Father's glory and honor, we also find Jesus challenging the religious establishment's corruption of the place of prayer for the nations by allowing it to become a marketplace, full of bargaining and profiteering and the usual efforts to one-up the person on the other side of the exchange.

When challenged as to his authority to overturn the tables of the moneychangers and such, Jesus pointed to his Body as the coming replacement of all that the temple symbolized. His death and resurrection would show his authority over the temple. His sacrifice, his shed blood, his priestly offering of himself to God would ultimately mean that he would be the one in whose name prayer would be heard; he would be the "place" where people met with God; he would be the manifestation of the glory of God in the midst of the peoples of the world; he would be the one to gather and form a new community that would carry out his redeeming work in the world.

But we are also told that Jesus knew what was in us. He knew of our fallenness, corruption, selfishness – the darkness within us. And he didn't entrust himself into the hands of men. He didn't come in ignorance of our brokenness. He came because of it – to save us from ourselves.

So back to our city of Charleston....

- What are some of the dark spots in our community that the Church needs to challenge?
- What might this challenging look like, given that we are called to challenge in love?
- It may not be enough to simply point out the problems. We need to offer an alternative, something better. What do we have to offer that the world needs and that it is looking for?
- How can our Life Group become an alternative community to what the world offers? How might we minister to the brokenness of our city?



**Week 3: Serving the City (HCC groups)**  
**Readings for Sunday, Jan 28 (not yet known: Claire Sullivan to preach)**  
**GIC kickoff**

- 7:00 Dinner and welcome**
- 7:45 Worship**
- 7:55 Introduce guest mission partner**
- 8:15 Group discussion**
- 8:25 Announcements and invitation**
- 8:30 Prayer and organic connect time**
- 9:00 End**

Epiphany is the season of the Church in which we remember that Christ is the light of the world that came to bring light and life to all of mankind – not just Jews, but Gentiles too. It is a season that naturally lends itself to discussions of mission: how to get the Gospel outside the walls of the church and out into the highways and byways and to every corner of the globe. For this reason, St Michael’s celebrates mission during Epiphany.

This week is our annual Global Impact Celebration. We are celebrating what God is doing here in the Holy City, along the Hurting Coast and all over the Hungering World. We are being challenged with the wondrous truth that God can take our feeble and faltering offering of ourselves and use us (even us!) to bring Christ to our community and to the world. We have the privilege tonight of hearing from \_\_\_\_\_, one of our mission partners serving in \_\_\_\_\_.

[Take a moment to pray that God would bless the guest ministry partner and use their testimony to inspire us and encourage us to take a step into active mission and ministry.]

After the speaker wraps us (around 8:15 – 15 to 20 minute talk), kick around 2 Buzz Group questions:

- What resonated in you when you heard \_\_\_\_’s testimony? Did God stir anything particular in you?
- When you consider the needs of Charleston and your own unique set of gifts, skills and interests, what opportunities do you see for serving our city in the coming year?

# Life Groups

## Week 4: Talking with our City (Life Group week)

### Readings for Sunday, Feb 4:

#### Proverbs 8:1-11, John 3:1-21 (GIC conclusion, Archbishop Foley Beach)

If your Life Group wishes to build discussion and study around our current sermon series, “Engaging the City,” we offer this overview and set of questions to aid in your preparation and presentation.

John 3:1-21 contains perhaps the best known (or at least most quoted) verse in the Bible: God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). But this verse only comes toward the end of a rather strange conversation that Jesus had with a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus under shadow of night. He may have come by night to avoid the crowds or out of fear of being seen with Jesus by his fellow Pharisees. Or it is possible that John gives this detail symbolically to indicate that Nicodemus is still in darkness and without a true understanding about Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

Given that chapter 2 of John ends with the comment that Jesus didn’t entrust himself to people because he knew what was in their hearts, it perhaps shouldn’t surprise us that Jesus isn’t swayed by the flattering opening from Nicodemus: “*we know* that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus gives an apparent non-sequitur: “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In this and other subsequent encounters, Jesus shows that he really does know what is in each person’s heart and he consistently gets to the very heart of a person. Here, Nicodemus points to the signs and, in effect, asks Jesus “Who are you really?” Jesus challenges Nicodemus’ ability to process and interpret such heavenly things unless he is born again. If Nicodemus was wondering if Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus was asking him if he was ready to meet such a Person?

Jesus doesn’t water anything down. He doesn’t apologize for the Truth. Jesus sets the Truth before Nicodemus and invites him into eternal life by receiving/believing in the Son of Man.

#### Questions for discussion:

- Why is it so difficult to speak with people about Jesus or about our faith?
- When you have had conversations with people about Jesus, how did they respond? What were their objections to the faith? Were those objections based on misunderstandings?
- How can we uncompromisingly set Jesus before others in a way that is respectful of their freedom to receive or reject our message?



## Week 5: Restoring our City (HCC week) Readings for Sunday, Feb 18: Isaiah 61:1-4, John 4:1-42

### Goal:

- Problematic behavior is often only a symptom of deep hurt, brokenness and/or loneliness.
- Learning to see past the presentation and listening for the heart.
- Being willing to offer people our time and our listening, and to point them to something better than what they are seeking (Jesus!).

### Launch questions and opening thoughts:

- Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone about something they had absolutely no interest in? What was that like? (talk leader can perhaps give a personal example of this)
- What do shame and significant mistakes do to our relationship with others?

### Read and discuss passage: John 4:1-42 (print out for distribution)

- This is the account of an isolated, shamed woman who was so estranged from her community that she only gathered water in the heat of the day when no one else was around. She had made some bad decisions in life, particularly in her relationships with men: five failed marriages and a current live-in. Yet, after her encounter with Jesus she is energized, renewed and apparently restored to her community.
- Jews didn't associate with Samaritans in Jesus' day. Men generally didn't talk to women in public settings. When the woman came to draw water, she was likely hoping to not meet anyone. To meet a Jewish man alone would have been a rather awkward scene. She certainly didn't expect a conversation when she encountered Jesus sitting at the well at high noon. But doggone it, he spoke to her: "Give me a drink."
  - Jesus risked crossing conventional lines to speak to a stranger.
  - Jesus **started where the "stuff" of where the woman was** as she tended to a rather obvious need: getting water.
- The woman responded with a surprised what's-going-on-here question that might have been asked to figure out if this strange man was looking to her for more than just water. Jesus ignored those implications. And **begins to point the woman to something more significant** than the physical water of the well. He suggests that she is thirsty in a deeper way and that he can give her living water that will satisfy that deeper thirst. Not exactly understanding what Jesus was saying, the woman says "Go ahead and give me this water you have so I don't have to keep coming to this well." And then Jesus **puts his finger on the heart-wound**: "Go, call your husband, and come here." The exchange that follows lets the woman know that Jesus is some kind of prophet, and Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah that was to come.

- When the disciples return, the woman apparently takes the cue from Jesus (go, call your husband, and come here), returns to the town, and begins to tell folks of her strange encounter at the well. She suggests that perhaps the Christ had come and that they should come out to the well to meet him. And they do.

#### **Questions for Buzz Groups:**

- What was it like when you were on the receiving end of some very direct questioning? Were there elements of your response that helped move you and that person toward understanding or toward an ability to really hear each other?
- Tell of a time when you spoke with someone about Jesus and in listening to the other person you became aware of where their real objections or hurts were.
- How has God led you to help someone once their real needs were made known?
- What's it like to find forgiveness and restoration to community after times of shame and isolation? How can we invite others into our community?

#### **Takeaways:**

- We can't help restore someone if we don't know where the brokenness really lies. We must first engage the person where they are and listen for the deeper heart cries.
- Only addressing "presenting issues" often misses the real issue a person is struggling with...
- ... But we start with where the person is, point them to something better, and go to the heart of the matter with them.

#### **Announcements and invitation**

**Prayer (perhaps praying for those who don't yet know Jesus)**

**Organic connect time**