



Course Notes

Introduction

Thanks for reading this bit at the beginning of GLUE. When I read a book I usually skip the preface and dive straight in to the first chapter, so well done!

GLUE was originally developed for the teachers of a local primary school. Every day they were leading Christian assemblies and sometimes struggled to understand how a particular Bible story or theme would fit into the wider context of Christianity. GLUE was written to give them the big picture. GLUE was also broadcast as a series in 'Pause for Thought' on BBC Radio Devon in 2012.

What is GLUE?

GLUE is a short, seven-week course that explores something theologians call the Grand Meta-narrative. This is a posh way of saying the 'overarching story' or the 'big picture'. GLUE will give you an overview of how the Jewish community, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, Church and Christians fit into the story of God and the world.

Throughout the content of GLUE, I communicate a 'missional' gospel - one that makes sense and shows how you and I fit into the unfolding story of God in the world. I also want you to track the concepts of **temple** and **water** throughout the story, catching something of the deep symbolism embedded in the Christian faith. But because many of us lead busy lives, GLUE is also designed to be short and punchy.

GLUE is written from the perspective of a believing Christian (that'd be me). Not all Christians understand or interpret everything in the same way, but it might be helpful to see how I understand the big picture and the unfolding story of God in the world.

Who is GLUE for?

GLUE can be used as a starting place for people who work with Christian churches or church schools to help them understand the basics of Christianity. It can be run over breakfast, in a lunch hour or in a small group at work or at home.

What is the content of GLUE?

The seven GLUE sessions are:

1. **Creation** – the story of the world and human beings
2. **Collapse** – how humans put themselves before God and others
3. **Community** – the story of the chosen people of God.
4. **Christ** - the life of Jesus and what it means
5. **Cross** - the death, resurrection of Jesus and what it means
6. **Church** – the coming of The Holy Spirit and the Christian Church
7. **Christian** - so what's next?

Each GLUE session consists of:

1. Something to chew on – a short talk, video or podcast
2. Some chewing – discussion and questions

What will I need?

You will need this booklet and a steady supply of chocolate and tea. A pen might be useful to scribble things down, and a Bible (physical or online) might be handy to take a look at. There are different types of Bible. For this course we recommend you use a modern translation such as a New Living Translation (NLT) or The New International Version (NIV). Probably best to avoid the old-fashioned language of the King James Version for now.

Acknowledgments

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Heaps of Peace

Revd Gavin Tyte, 2013

I. Creation

In the beginning...

One day, when I was at secondary school, the head teacher decided to give me some advice. He sat me down in his study and said to me, “Gavin, you will never be successful in the music industry and you will never be a successful performer.” Nice huh? When I think back, I suppose he was trying to help me by encouraging me to pursue a more ‘respectable’ career. However, deep inside I felt crushed - not that I thought I was ever going to be a pop star; it was more that I felt that through the creative arts I had something to offer the world. Somehow his comment wasn’t just discouraging the career decision of a 17-year-old young man: no, he was doing something far more destructive: he was eroding the very core of who I was created to be.

Have you ever wondered why human beings are so creative? We can’t help it. We’re creative in the way we dress, do our hair (if we have any), speak, think and move. We’re created in the image of a creative God and therefore **to be human is to be creative**. Creativity has been at the heart of humanity since the very beginning.

The very first book in the Bible is called Genesis. Genesis means beginning. Not a bad title for the first book in a collection of books!

At the very beginning of the beginning, in the book of Genesis, is an account of God making the world and human beings. Now some people get hung up on how the world was made – was it evolution or creation? To get sidetracked into that argument is to miss the point. There are two things you need to know about Genesis – well, three actually but the third one I will come onto in the next session – so for now there are two things:

Thing Number 1 – Creativity

The first point of the story at the beginning of Genesis is that **people were made in the image of God**. God said, “Let’s make human beings in our image”. Hmm, that’s odd. God said, “our image”. He didn’t say, “my image”. Right from the beginning, we learn that God is somehow both one and many at the same time. Too deep, too quick? Okay, we’ll

come to that later. (Also note that God is neither a he nor a she. However, for the sake of convention, I will use 'he' when talking about God.)

So, for five days God made stuff and then on day six he made human beings in his (or their) image. All we know about God up to day six is that he makes stuff. God had been making stuff for five days. All God had been doing was being creative and then God made human beings in his image.

I visit a lot of schools as a speaker and performer and I often hear young people say, "I'm not creative." Rubbish. You **are** creative. Some people are creative in what we call 'creative arts' – i. e. music, dance, art, writing etc. – but the creative arts is a small subset of creativity. Some people are creative with numbers, others with plants and animals. When you get alongside someone who is lonely or broken-hearted and you listen to them, you're using your creativity. When you wipe someone's bum in an elderly care home, you're being creative. Yes, really. And this leads us nicely onto Thing Number 2.

Thing Number 2 – Chaos

The second thing you need to know about the story at the beginning of Genesis is that **creativity is bringing order out of chaos**. Let me explain...

Right at the beginning of the beginning, some of the very first words of Genesis in The Bible are:

"The Spirit of God was hovering over the water."

Now in the Bible, water – especially natural water – is very important. Water in ancient times meant one thing and one thing only – chaos. Let me say it again - **water means chaos**. It's very important that you know this and remember it because we'll come across water throughout the Bible.

So, from this water or chaos, God started making stuff. In other words he started bringing order out of the chaos - and that's what he's all about. This is what God does. He plans and wants to bring order out of chaos in the world. Then God made human beings in his image. He made us to be co-creators with him in the world.

We are called to use our God-given creativity to bring order out of chaos in the world. How cool is that? It's probably time to take a break and let that sink in. Perhaps go and make a cup of tea and then come back.

Going deeper...

A famous theologian (a person who studies God) called Walter Brueggemann describes the creation story in Genesis as saying something about who God is and what God is like rather than how God scientifically made the world. It wasn't meant to be a scientific document.

The scientific view of the world is quite a recent thing and a very useful thing it is, too. However, people in biblical times didn't have a scientific view of the world. So you can see why treating the creation account in Genesis like a scientific textbook is a daft idea, because it's from another time and culture.

Summary

So far, God has made human beings to be co-creators with him in the world. God and humans are working together to bring order out of chaos and everything is good and right and lovely. Perfect.

Discussion

Genesis = Beginning. **Read Genesis Chapter 1.** Try and get a sense of the flow and movement in the text. If you are in a small group, perhaps read a paragraph each - the ones starting with, "And God said..."

1. Human beings are creative and creativity defines us as human beings.

What difference does it make to the way we live our lives if we recognise that we are made to be creative?

2. We often think of creativity as being just 'Creative Arts'.

How is your creativity expressed in your life - at home, work, rest or play?

3. God says, "Let's make human beings in our image".

Why do you think God says 'our image' rather than 'my image'?

4. Natural water in the Bible is often a symbol of chaos. Can you think of or remember any Bible stories that involve water?

In those stories can you have a stab at thinking what the water might represent or symbolise?

5. Humans are called to use their God-given creativity to bring order out of chaos in the world.

What chaos can you identify in yourself, your relationships and the environment?

(Note: in a group setting you might not wish to share your own personal chaos!)

6. Walter Brueggemann says that Genesis is not a scientific document.

Why do you think some people get sidetracked into arguing about creation and evolution or the Bible and science? (Note: in a group setting you might want to watch the time on this one!)

2. Collapse

Making the wrong choice

In the first session we heard some of the good news - we're all creative. But there's also some bad news - we messed things up.

A few years ago, I attended a local community event - a free occasion being organised by a loving group of committed volunteers. Instead of finding a legitimate parking space, a woman parked her red sports car in the wheelchair-only parking bay by the doors of the building. She then pushed her way to the front of the queue to get in and during the event said in a loud voice that the event wasn't going the way *she* thought it should. The people around her began to avoid her and even her friends distanced themselves from her. Sadly, she was oblivious to the consequences of her perceived self-importance.

C. S. Lewis, who wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, was a Christian and he also wrote lots of books about Christianity. In one of them he said this:

"There is one vice of which no person in the world is free, which everyone in the world loathes when it is seen in someone else, and of which hardly any people ever imagine they are guilty themselves."

Can you guess what it is yet? It's pride. Now I'm not talking about the kind of pride where you're proud of your child or pleased with something you've achieved. I'm talking about the decision to put ourselves first - ahead of God and others. And for some reason, human beings decided and continue to decide that they don't need God.

Do you notice that there is an "I" in the middle of the word pride? And when 'I' put myself first - i.e. when the world revolves around us as individuals - things start to go wrong. Without pride there would be no greed, anger, jealousy, lust, apathy or lack of self-control. Like the self-important woman with the red sports car, **pride breaks relationships**.

In one way it makes no rational sense whatsoever. Why would anyone put their relationship with God and others at risk? But in another way I understand this problem because it's about me. I do stuff all the time where I put myself first.

For all of our advances in technology and collective knowledge, for all of our claims there's no need for God or religion, the world really is in a bit of a mess isn't it?

Christians say that we're wired to be co-workers with God, to help bring order out of the chaos in people's lives, relationships and the environment. And yet the reality is that the world doesn't seem to be getting any better. **There's a problem - and the problem is pride.**

As we've heard in the story, pride breaks relationships with others but there are also two other consequences of pride.

Consequence 1 - Separation from the world

We live in a world where one group of people thinks they are better than another and wipes them out with machetes. We live in a world where thousands of children die every day because they don't have enough water, food, shelter or basic medical attention. And at the same time we live in a world where people spend billions on weapons that they will probably never use. If you don't believe me, go and check out a news website.

How many stories in the news are good news stories or how many are about humans putting themselves first? (Remember the 'I' in pride?) Yes, there are some massive natural disasters but perhaps if we worked together on earthquake predictions or made sure that buildings were stable or sea defences were stronger, we would see fewer people being hurt. Right now we do little or nothing in global terms. I know that this all sounds very 'doom and gloom' and it is not my intention to heap guilt onto people, but we have to face the reality that there is something wrong with the choices that humans often make. We have to own up and take responsibility for our part in the mess.

Consequence 2 - Separation from God

What's the consequence of our pride? Well, there's something about God that we need to bear in mind. God is perfect – perfectly good, righteous and just. One of the writers in the Bible describes God as 'love' itself. To sum it up in three words, **God is holy**. And our choice to put ourselves first, before God and others, puts a gap between God and us. To

put it another way, we're unholy. Remember – pride breaks relationships. It isn't that God has withdrawn from us but that we've withdrawn from God.

Another biblical word for pride and all that results from it is the dreaded word 'sin'. (Another word with 'l' in the middle!)

The word sin comes with all sorts of baggage. I want you to put all your thoughts about it to one side for a moment. A brainy theologian called Jürgen Moltmann defines sin as “that which separates us from God.” Sin doesn't just mean the things we do but can also mean the things we don't do. Sin can be apathy or indifference. For example, if we stand by and don't act when we see an injustice in the world, then that's also sin. So, some theologians say that we're all sinning all the time! That's a scary thought!

Hope

The good news is that there's hope. Christians believe that God hasn't given up on the world (phew – that's a relief); that he loves us despite the fact that we've put ourselves ahead of him and ahead of others.

When God made the world and human beings he didn't just say, “Oooh, that's nice.” No, the writer of Genesis said this:

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

God loves the world he made and he loves us – despite the fact that we've put ourselves ahead of him and ahead of others. God longs to be friends with us again and for us to be holy so that we can get on with the task of bringing order out of chaos together. And because God made us in his image, he gave us the capacity to use our creativity for good. Despite our mess-ups and failures, God believes in us.

Summary

So far, God has made human beings to be co-creators with him in the world. God and humans are working together to bring order out of chaos and everything is good and right and lovely. Perfect.

But because of pride, humans separated themselves from the world, from God and from each other. God is pure and perfectly holy and we aren't. We got ourselves into a mess.

Discussion

1. Pride is putting ourselves first ahead of God and others and pride breaks relationships.

What is the opposite of pride?

2. Pride breaks our relationship with each other and with the environment.

How does pride ultimately relate to the following: poverty, war, depletion of natural resources?

3. We live in a world where there is still untamed chaos or natural disasters.

If God made the world so 'good' how come there is so much pain in the world not caused by humans? (Note: answering this question could take up a volume of books and a lifetime of discussion but it's important to recognise that the question is out there.)

4. Our Western society is very individualistic - being about our personal wants and desires.

How does pride relate to individualism?

5. Jürgen Moltmann defines sin as "that which separates us from God."

How is it helpful to think of sin as that which separates us from God rather than a long list of things we do wrong?

6. Some theologians say that we're all sinning all the time!

In what way are humans are in a constant 'state' of sinfulness?

7. If pride is putting yourself first,

In what way do you put yourself ahead of God and others?

8. Christians believe that God hasn't given up on the world.

What would it take for the gap to be closed between humans and each other, the environment and God?

3. Community

God had a plan

Have you ever wondered if there's a bigger plan behind life - that it's not just be born, live, die, full stop?

I have a confession to make – and please, don't tell anyone. I was kicked out of Sunday school. In fact, I was kicked out of nursery school, too. It's true to say that my school years were pretty fraught. I was certainly no angel but I had a run of bad luck and suffered both emotional and physical abuse at school. By the time I was 16 and starting my A Levels I had a serious problem with authority – particularly teachers. I was a bully and what most would call a total prat. Then, I had a new teacher for one of my A Level subjects. He was patient and didn't get angry, and although I pushed him to the point where I was excluded from school, he never gave up on me. His words of encouragement still ring in my head to this day, "Gavin, I believe in you. We can do this." To everyone's surprise, in his subject, I got a B. Some years later when I, too, became a teacher, I wrote to him to thank him. It turned out that in twenty years of teaching, not one of his students had ever failed.

I was amazed by one man's determination and faithfulness not to give up on a lost student. And in my years as a follower of Jesus, I've been amazed by God's determination and faithfulness not to give up on people – including me.

For some reason, God chose to involve us in his plan to restore and renew the world. **We got ourselves into this mess and God wants to work with us to get us out of it.**

So, God came up with a strategy and he chose a bunch of people to form and build a community that would bless and influence the world. These people would be his agents or ambassadors in the world. They would represent him and show the world that God is God. These people started with Jacob (who became known as Israel), who was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham (formerly known as Abram). Today we know of Israel as a place but Israel started as a community.

Check this bit out from the book of Genesis. To make things easier to find in the Bible, the early Christians divided the books into chapters and verses. This bit is from Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1 to 3.

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

See the last line there - **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you**. This community was going to be a blessing.

But why start with people in that part of the world? Why not Wales or New Zealand? Well, the answer is strategic. You see, this community called Israel was at the 'crossroads of the world'. Israel sat between the empires - the world powers - of the east and west. Whoever influenced the region between them could influence the known world. Cool, eh?

The first deal is done

So, God chose the people and he did a deal with them. He said to them, "If you will be my people then I will be your God." In other words, "I promise to protect and guide you but you must promise to follow only me." This promise made to Abraham and his descendants was called a covenant or a testament. The chosen people were to be God's priests (representatives of God) to the world – to bless the nations.

Read this excerpt from Genesis 17:1-9

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come."

Water, water everywhere!

Now, remember the whole water and chaos thing? Well, think on this. A few generations after this community was formed, the people of Israel were working closely with the Egyptians. Do you remember the story of Joseph and his amazing technicolour dreamcoat? Well, all that took place in Egypt. Sadly after a generation or two, the people of Israel (known also as Israelites) were made slaves by the Egyptians. Thankfully, they were rescued by God in an event called the Exodus. They were led by Moses and crossed the Red Sea - and the water parted miraculously. (By the way, God told Moses that he was called "I AM". Make a mental note of that, as it will be important later).

Then, after wandering about, being led by Moses for forty years, the people arrived in a land that would be their own. To get there they crossed the River Jordan, which parted miraculously. They crossed the water again.

Do you see? If water represents chaos, God showed that he hadn't given up his plan to bring order out of chaos in the world - and these symbols became powerful reminders to the people of Israel about their God and their mission to the world.

Building a house for God

Although God couldn't be physically united with them because of the whole sin thing (remember – God is pure and holy and we aren't), he could guide them and speak to them

from a distance. But God wanted to be with the people. We can read about this in the book of Exodus in the Bible:

“They shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst”

When the people were living like nomads, they built a special tent for God to live in but later they built a great temple in Jerusalem. This temple had outer and inner bits and right in the middle was a place called the Holy of Holies. This was where God’s presence would be, and once a year (on a special day called the Day of Atonement) a high priest would go through a whole heap of cleansing rituals, go into the Holy of Holies and be in the presence of God.

Today, many Jewish people (note that Jew means ‘child of Israel’) mourn the loss of the temple because they feel that without it God is unable to live amongst them.

Forming community

So the people of God had a place to call their own and it eventually became known as Israel. It took time for the community to learn to become God-like and to bless the world. And we read about this in the Bible.

The Bible is split into two sections. The first section is called the Old Testament (covenant or deal) and these are the writings from this community of people, called by God. It’s divided up into 39 books that contain their history, poetry, songs, teaching and prophecy.

The story we read in the Old Testament is about people who kept making mistakes, doing their own thing and going their own way. But God, keeping his side of the bargain, kept bringing them back in line. He gave them laws to help them to be different, and prophets to announce to them how they were doing – blessing them when they were doing well or cursing them when they were doing badly.

Even though the community kept abandoning God, getting beaten up and handed over to their enemies – something that went on for centuries and centuries - there was an underlying hope. In the middle of all the problems, the idea kept cropping up that God would fulfil his promise through this community, and that this would happen by the raising up of a special king. God had promised that the people would be a blessing and God keeps his promises. The idea emerged that someone - God’s chosen one - would be

raised up from the community and would lead the people into freedom from their enemies and establish God's rule once and for all. This person was called Messiah (which means 'anointed one' in Hebrew) or Christ (which means 'anointed one' in Greek). And so the people of God waited. And waited. In fact, the last recognised prophet was in about 400 BC and before Jesus arrives on the scene there are 400 years of radio silence. Then, within a hundred years everything changed for the Jewish people – everything.

Perhaps this section should be called Commitment, because throughout the Hebrew Bible we see God's commitment to his community?

Summary

So far, God has made human beings to be co-creators with him in the world. God and humans are working together to bring order out of chaos and everything is good and right and lovely. Perfect.

But because of pride, humans separated themselves from the world, from God and from each other. God is pure and perfectly holy and we aren't. We got ourselves into a mess.

So God chose a community to bless and influence the world so that the world might know that God is God. God promised this community that they would bless the world. God's presence was in a temple.

Discussion

1. God chose a bunch of people to form and build a community that would bless and influence the world.

Why do you think God chose to involve humans in his plan to restore and renew the world?

2. God makes a deal with his chosen people (also called a covenant or testament). He says, "If you will be my people then I will be your God."

Why do you think God made this deal?

3. The people of God had a dramatic rescue from Egypt and the crossing of the River Jordan into the promised land.

What do you think they did to help themselves remember these two hugely symbolic acts?

4. God's presence was in the holiest place in the temple called the 'holy-of-holies'.

Why do you think the high priest went through cleansing rituals before entering the holy-of-holies?

5. The Bible is the collection of writings from a community of God's chosen people.

Why do you think many people believe that the Bible has changed over the years?

6. We are getting an idea of what community means to God and for the world.

What does the word community mean to you?

4. Christ

The world of Jesus

Thousands of years ago, God chose a community and promised them that the world would be blessed through them. A hope emerged that God's chosen or 'anointed' one would arrive and would free the people from their enemies and establish God's rule once and for all. This person was called 'Messiah' or 'Christ'. And so the people of God waited. It was as if God had abandoned them. There were no new prophecies about this person and no new revelations from God.

Would it ever happen? The world was still a mess and the people of God in Israel were also in a mess.

Two thousand years ago, the area we now know as Palestine was occupied by perhaps the most brutal empire the world had ever known – The Roman Empire – and it was into this political and social chaos that Jesus was born.

Jesus was born the son of a builder from a backwater called Nazareth. He was born into poverty and not riches.

John the Baptist

But before Jesus arrived there was another bloke on the scene dubbed John the Baptist and he was Jesus' cousin. When he was about 30 years old, John started telling the people that the Anointed One was just about to arrive. To ready themselves the people were baptised (which literally means plunged) by John in the River Jordan - the same river the community had crossed all those years ago. They were again aligning themselves with the mission and purpose of God. And who should turn up to be baptised by John but Jesus himself!

Jesus' Public Ministry

Jesus began his public ministry at the age of 30. Israel was still an occupied territory; God seemed to be absent. The reality was that in Jesus' time there were many different groups with different ideas and ideologies. However, for clarity's sake we've grouped them into four differing factions; The Herodians, The Pharisees, The Essenes and The Zealots.

1. The Herodians

The Herodians, led by King Herod, thought like this. "It doesn't look like this Messiah bloke's going to turn up. I'm the king and I reckon we might as well get on with the Romans. So what if Caesar says he's God? We should collaborate with the Romans – bow down to Caesar if necessary – and have a peaceful life. It's got to be better than resistance, hasn't it?"

2. The Pharisees

Then there were the Pharisees. They went around telling everybody this: "So you want the Messiah to turn up? Well, he would, but you lot aren't holy enough. It's your fault. If only you miserable sinners obeyed every one of his commands to the letter just for a single day then he'd turn up. It's because of your lack of obedience that we are in this mess. So get holy!"

3. The Essenes

Then there were the Essenes. They thought, "We need to separate ourselves from the rest of this corrupt society. Let's go and form a community out in the desert, away from the rest of the world and its bad influences. Then, perhaps the Messiah will come."

4. The Zealots

Finally, there were the Zealots. "You want to know why the Messiah hasn't come? Well, it's because we need to fight. Draw your swords! We must resist the Romans and if we fight

them, then surely God will be on our side and raise up a saviour for us – The Messiah – who will come and kick Roman butt and be God’s king of the world. Wahoo!”

The King has come

It was into this mess that Jesus came. He showed what it meant to put God and others above yourself. If you want to see what God is like or how God would behave, then look at Jesus:

1. He claimed that he was the King.
2. He demonstrated that God’s plan had never changed – that it was God’s plan to bring order out of chaos in the world - in our lives, relationships and the environment.
3. He invited people to follow him and join in with God’s mission in the world.

There’s a story in the Bible where Jesus walks on water, which underlines all of these three things. It wasn’t just a demonstration of power but it represented what he came to do. The story can be found near the end of the Bible, in the book by Matthew, chapter 14, verses 22 to 32:

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

This is a great story. What does water represent? That's right - chaos. Jesus walked over the water. Can you remember where else in the Bible God hovers over water? Let me remind you. It was right at the beginning of the beginning in Genesis:

"The Spirit of God was hovering over the water."

Jesus walked over the water and said, "Don't be afraid, it is I." Jesus used the same phrase here that God used with Moses, to say who he was. In other words, "Don't be afraid, the I AM is here." In other words, again, "Don't be afraid, God is here!"

Then he did an extraordinary thing. He invited Peter to get out onto the water with him. Jesus was inviting Peter – the person through whom Jesus would extend God's community – to join him in bringing order out of chaos. Peter started to sink and Jesus grabbed his arm and pulled him up. Now, some Christians say that this was a story about faith – if only Peter had had enough faith then he wouldn't have sunk. Yes, it took faith for Peter to get out of the boat, but the point was that Peter sank and Jesus was saying, "You can't do this on your own, you need me." Then the waves were calmed. This is a very important picture of what Jesus came to do and what he called his followers to do too.

In other words, **we are called to join Jesus in bringing order out of chaos.**

Summary

So far, God has made human beings to be co-creators with him in the world. God and humans are working together to bring order out of chaos and everything is good and right and lovely. Perfect.

But because of pride, humans separated themselves from the world, from God and from each other. God is pure and perfectly holy and we aren't. We got ourselves into a mess.

So God chose a community to bless and influence the world so that the world might know that God is God. God promised this community that they would bless the world. God's presence was in the temple.

Then Jesus came into the world claiming to be the king, to bring order out of chaos and calling people to be his disciples and to follow him.

Discussion

1. Jesus was born into the social and political chaos of an occupied territory.

Why would God the Father choose Jesus to be born into poverty and at such a difficult time in the history of the people of Israel?

2. John baptised people in the River Jordan to help them prepare for the coming Messiah.

Why then would Jesus come and be baptised?

3. In Jesus' time there were many different groups with different ideas and ideologies.

In what way do you think it was natural that the people of God should have such differing views on The Messiah and how and when he would come?

4. Jesus invited Peter out onto the water with him.

Why do you think that Peter started to sink when he walked on the water?

5. There are often situations in our lives where we feel that we are sinking.

What could cause you to sink?

S. Cross

The Message of Jesus

While Jesus was going around teaching about his kingdom and doing good stuff, he began to tick some people off. Let me paraphrase what Jesus said in his life and ministry.

Jesus said to the Herodians, “You don’t restore and renew the world by collaborating with a brutal empire – and you certainly don’t bow down to Caesar. What’s all that about?”

Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You don’t restore and renew the world by telling people that they are unholy. In fact you are the ones who are unholy! You tell people that they’re going to hell but I tell you that you are twice the sons of hell than they are!” Strong language, eh?

Jesus said to the Essenes, “You don’t restore and renew the world by being separate from it. What are you doing out there in the desert? You’re the people of God and you’re called to be in the world – like salt or light.”

Jesus said to the Zealots, “Put your swords away. Do you think I came to start a revolution with swords? Is that God’s way? Is that the way of love and peace and grace and mercy?”

In just three years of ministry Jesus had managed to offend just about every political faction, so some of the ‘chosen people’ plotted to have him killed. In fact, they tried a few times to either stone him or throw him off a cliff.

Eventually they got Jesus arrested and sent for trial – first with the Jewish authorities and then with the Roman overlords. At Jesus’ trial a strange thing happened. They couldn’t seem to pin a single thing on him – nothing.

The trial of all trials

When I was about eight years old I was sitting with my mate Jonathan on the back seat of ‘Nelly’, the school bus. In the car behind, two punks started sticking up two fingers up at us. So, giggling, we returned the favour. However, the deputy head who was driving the bus heard what we’d done. Anyway, when we got back to school, he asked both Jonathan

and I if we had done the dastardly deed. I confessed but Jonathan denied doing it. The next morning in school assembly, I was made to stand up and was publicly shamed in front of the whole school. And as a punishment, the head teacher asked all of the pupils not to speak to me for a day. You can say 'ahh' now.

I'm not entirely sure that the punishment fitted the crime, and it hurt deeply. However, I was, after all, guilty.

Think for a moment. If your whole life was on trial, do you think that anyone from any period in your life could come up with a single thing that you'd ever done wrong? If it was me, I'm sure the authorities would have to come up with some sort of system to manage the queues!

But when Jesus stood trial for his life, no-one could think of a single thing he'd ever done wrong in his entire life. It was like, "Oh yes, I remember when Jesus did that terrible thing, you know the one where... oh, no, that wasn't Jesus, it was Bernard," or, "I remember! Yes, that time when Jesus said that shocking thing to... oh, no, wrong again, that was Barbara." They couldn't come up with a single charge apart from one...

They did manage to come up with one accusation that stuck. Jesus had suggested that he was God. In first century Palestine, that was blasphemy, a big 'no-no', and a crime punishable by death. And so because of this one thing – and because of nothing else - Jesus was tortured and then crucified - nailed to a cross and left to die.

There's not much I want to say about crucifixion other than it was a death so horrible and so cruel that even the Romans eventually banned it.

Jesus' friends and his followers completely deserted him – they decided he clearly wasn't the one everyone thought was going to free the people. Some of his disciples were fishermen and they went back to their boats. Even Peter, who said he'd follow Jesus anywhere, eventually fled when he was recognised as a mate of Jesus. But three days later, the tomb in which Jesus' body had been laid was empty.

Resurrection

We've already seen that God has a plan for our lives. Now we see that God had been putting another plan into action that was bigger and better and more exciting than anyone

had imagined. Even his closest disciples hadn't fully understood what was going on. At his trial, some of them, (especially the Zealots), still thought that Jesus was going to lead a physical revolution – that the Romans would be overthrown and that God's Kingdom or rule would be established by force. But their hopes were crushed when Jesus was executed.

However, when the tomb was found empty, they started to put things together – especially things Jesus had said. Remember in the last chapter how God's presence was in The Temple and how important the temple was to the Jewish community? Jesus had mentioned that The Temple would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. They hadn't clicked that he was talking about himself. And of course, The Temple was where God resided.

You see, God's plan had never changed. His plan was and has always been about restoring and renewing this world – and his plan has always involved humanity. He promised that the chosen people of God would bring about change in the world - that they would be his agents or ambassadors and that through them the reign of God's king would be established.

To truly fulfil this calling, God needs to be connected with humans in such a way that we see the world through his eyes. In the same way that Jesus lifted Peter out of the water, we humans need to be connected to God. Try as we might, we won't be able to do the job on our own.

And so, God's plan was to set the people free – not as they expected, from the bondage of the Romans – but from sin itself. Remember that sin is that which separates us from God, and his plan was to close the gap between himself and humans so that we could work together to restore and renew the world. Jesus lived and died so that God could come and live in human beings – make his home in us, be friends with us, help us, guide us – for the very purpose of bringing order out of chaos in the world – the chaos in our own lives, in the lives of those around us and in the environment. How cool is that?

In other words, God's plan was to make everyone holy so that God could literally hang out with them or in them. This is what Jesus came to do and he achieved it. This is why it mattered that he had done nothing wrong. Do you see that? If Jesus had been guilty of a single crime then he would have needed to be saved and he couldn't have saved anyone.

He would just have been in the same boat as everyone else. It was only because he had never sinned - never been separated from God - that he could break the power of sin.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection had made it possible for the gap of sin to be closed. It shifted things in the spiritual realm – for the whole world – for everyone - forever.

There was this thought that physical death in human beings was the result of being separated from God because of sin. Jesus' tomb was empty because death couldn't hold a person who had done nothing wrong. Jesus' resurrection was a sign that things had changed – forever.

Sometimes I hear Christians explaining the gospel like this: “Jesus Christ died for our sins (full stop).” But to my mind and from my reading of the Bible, this is just part of a much bigger story – the overarching story of God and his plan for the world. And if we ignore the bigger story, then we are missing out. Some might add an extra line such as: “Jesus Christ died for our sins so that we could live forever and not go to hell.” Again, this seems to tap into a wider story but it's not quite the whole picture. I would say, “Jesus Christ died for our sins that we might be made holy so that God could come and live in us to help and guide us as we work together to restore and renew the world.” Okay, so that was a bit of a mouthful but you get my point?

Summary

So far, God has made human beings to be co-creators with him in the world. God and humans are working together to bring order out of chaos and everything is good and right and lovely. Perfect.

But because of pride, humans separated themselves from the world, from God and from each other. God is pure and perfectly holy and we aren't. We got ourselves into a mess.

So God chose a community to bless and influence the world so that the world might know that God is God. God promised this community that they would bless the world. God's presence is in the temple.

Then Jesus came into the world claiming to be the king, to bring order out of chaos and calling people to be his disciples and to follow him.

Jesus died and is resurrected. God dealt with the sin of the whole world – the thing which separated humans from God. And a new creation, a new community, is now established.

Discussion

1. Jesus upset nearly every political and religious faction.

Why do you think the religious authorities found Jesus so offensive?

2. At his trial, Jesus didn't defend himself or his actions.

Why do you think Jesus didn't defend himself or his actions?

3. Jesus suggested that he was God. That meant he was either mad, bad, or really who he said he was.

If Jesus was telling the truth, what does that mean for the world – and for you?

4. Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week.

Why do you think Jesus' resurrection took place on a Sunday (the first day of the week)?

5. Jesus' tomb was empty and the power of death was overcome.

Why did Jesus have to rise again (be resurrected)?

6. Church

What is church?

Some people aren't interested in thinking about God and his plan for the world because they've been put off by the idea of church.

When I was a child, I went along to church with my mum and dad. All I remember of the worship was that the building was cold, the women wore hats, the vicar wore a dress, we sat on wooden pews and we sang Victorian hymns! When they had Sunday School, it seemed that all we ever did was colour in pictures of Moses. I swear that it wasn't long before I had a whole collection of Moseses (or should that be Mosai?) decorated in multiple colour combinations. Church was boring, out-of-touch and irrelevant – well, to me anyway. God had left the building. You can imagine my surprise when at the age of 16, after moving house, I went along to my local church to discover a warm building, lively songs, engaging talks and a whole heap of families and children. But, more than that, what really threw me was that when these people talked to God they claimed that God talked back! Either they had completely lost it or they were onto something.

These Christians claimed that God had come in the person of Jesus and somehow made humans spiritually clean so that God's presence could come and be with them – even 2,000 years later. They claimed that somehow Jesus had made it possible for God's spirit – the Holy Spirit – to come and live in them. They made the outrageous claim that God was now living in them by his Holy Spirit and this is what I was witnessing.

So, at the age of 16 I discovered that the church wasn't a building, nor was it a bunch of people sitting in pews singing Victorian hymns on a Sunday morning. Church is a community of people filled with the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit of God comes

After Jesus was resurrected and the disciples (followers of Jesus) were in hiding, the strangest thing happened. They became filled with the spirit of God - we call this the Holy Spirit. Because sin no longer separated people from God, he could come and make his

home in them. This happened at the Jewish festival of Pentecost (coincidentally a festival where the Jewish people celebrated God giving his life-giving law to Moses).

But more than that, the Holy Spirit started to fill non-Jewish followers of Jesus. This was a major revelation to the disciples, who were all Jewish. It meant that Jesus had come not only for the Jewish people but for the whole world. The community that God had chosen to bless the world had just been radically extended to include you and me. And now the people of God weren't just following a set of rules or laws but were equipped by the very presence of God in their lives to carry out God's mission in the world.

Remember the temple?

Remember way back, how God's chosen community – the people of God - built a temple for the presence of God. Then remember how when Jesus came he replaced the temple – in other words, he was God. The King had come into the world. Jesus said that the temple would be torn down and rebuilt in three days - and he was talking about himself. In other words, the temple represents somewhere where the presence of God lives. Then finally the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, comes and lives in the people of God.

Remember that the Bible is in two halves? Well, the second half is called the New Testament (covenant, promise or deal). It's a collection of 27 books - histories and letters of the early church. In these, we discover that Christians understand themselves individually as The Temple and also collectively as The Temple. Paul, a follower of Jesus in the first century, wrote this in a letter found in the New Testament part of the Bible. He wrote to the followers of Jesus in a place called Corinth:

"For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people'".

Do you remember right back at the beginning of the beginning in Genesis God said,

"Let us make humans in our image"

God used the word 'our' as if God was more than one. Remember that? Well, now we can see that God is a community - Father, Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit. God the Father dwelt in the temple, Jesus replaced the temple as God made human, and then the Holy Spirit

came and filled the temple of believers. Cool, eh? We call this trio **The Trinity**. Three in One.

The local church

So, the church isn't a building or a style of worship. No, the church is a community of people filled with the Spirit of God, who are called to restore and renew the world. A community who are called to use their God-given creativity (under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit) to bring order out of chaos – in people's lives, relationships and the environment.

Oh, and here's a thing... What do people do when they decide to join in with God's mission in the world and to be followers of Jesus? They get baptised. And what does baptism involve? Water. I wonder why that could be...

Summary

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Jesus died and is resurrected. God dealt with the sin of the whole world – the thing which separated humans from God. And a new creation, a new community, is now established.

Because of Jesus, the Spirit of God (called the Holy Spirit) filled believers, helping them to see the world with God's eyes, transforming them from the inside-out and empowering them to fulfil their God-given mission.

Discussion

1. Church is not a building, nor is it a bunch of people sitting in pews singing Victorian hymns on a Sunday morning!

When someone says church what do you think of?

2. Christians understand themselves as being filled with the Spirit of God.

How do Christians become temples of the Holy Spirit? (Note: This is quite a tricky question to answer but have a go!)

3. The church is a community - called to use their God given creativity – under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit – to bring order out of chaos in people’s lives, relationships and the environment.

Do you think of your local church as a community on a God-given mission, and if so, why?

4. Water means chaos and features at key points throughout the Bible story.

Why do you think followers of Jesus undergo the ritual of baptism with water?

5. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week - a Saturday.

Why do you think the local church has traditionally gathered on the first day of the week - a Sunday?

7. Christian

Christians are like crisps

We now move from church to Christians. Did you know that Christians are like crisps? (that's 'chips' if you're from the USA). They all have roughly the same things in common but they come in a range of flavours. I'll try and make things simple. Christians fall roughly into four camps and these camps are: **traditionalists, evangelicals, liberals and charismatics.**

When presented with a particular life-decision each camp will have a slightly different emphasis:

- the **traditionalist** will ask, "What has been the *tradition* of the church?",
- the **evangelical** will ask, "What does the *Bible* tell us?",
- the **liberal** will ask, "What makes *common sense*?",
- and the **charismatic** will ask, "What does my *experience* with God tell me?"

All four camps are centred around Jesus Christ and it's important to note that a Christian can be in any or all of the camps at the same time. However, most Christians, including me, do not like to be labelled and simply think of themselves as Christian.

What do Christians do?

1. Prayer

Firstly, Christians pray. Prayer is aligning yourself with the mind of God and is a two-way thing. It involves listening to God and allowing him to speak - through our senses and our thoughts. It might involve simply spending time in God's presence with no agenda. It might involve reading the Bible and allowing God to speak through the words. It might involve thinking, writing or speaking to God with words of thanksgiving, confession, supplication (asking for things for ourselves) or intercession (asking for things for other people).

When we pray, we remember that God loves us, wants a relationship with us and wants to spend time with us. We aren't just slaves or robots planted on earth to do his bidding.

Christians also pray together - notably using the Lord's Prayer. This is a prayer that Jesus taught his disciples (followers):

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread

And forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us.

And may we not be led (by ourselves) into temptation

But deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory

Now and forever.

Amen.

2. Worship

Secondly, Christians worship. Christians believe that their whole life and the way that they live it is an expression of worship to God - i.e. that a life lived in honouring God, others and the environment is a living example of worship. However, Christians also gather specifically to worship God. Worship means giving something worth and when Christians worship they give worth to God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because Christians believe that Jesus was and is God, and they are thankful for what Jesus has done in closing the gap between people and God, there is often an emphasis on worshipping Jesus.

This kind of worship can take many forms and has traditionally involved saying or singing things together. We call spoken things we say together 'liturgy', and songs can take the form of hymns, chants and choruses. This kind of worshipping together can also include dance, poetry, instrumental music, art and even beatboxing! Worship in gatherings is often led by someone who uses one or more methods to help others to worship God.

Different groups of Christians will have different ways of worshipping together and you can walk into two different church gatherings (sometimes called services) and the style will be completely different but it's the same God - the same Father, Son and Holy Spirit that they are worshipping.

Most groups of Christians would say that a building is not essential for worship but most find that a building helps them to worship. A building or space can communicate something about the nature of God, be a safe place, or simply be a place that you can leave things lying around (such as Bibles or musical instruments).

3. Breaking of Bread

Thirdly, when Christians gather they often 'break bread' (i.e. tear a loaf of bread apart and share it) together. This is also called The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Mass or the Eucharist. Before Jesus died, he had a special memorial supper with his friends and he asked them to eat bread and drink wine as these were things that would help them to remember his body (the bread) and his blood (the wine), shed on the cross. Christians have continued to do this ever since.

Again, the form and format varies widely in different Christian groups and each will have a different emphasis on aspects of the breaking of bread. For example, some will emphasise the memorial aspect, others will emphasise it as a means of God including them in his family, and yet others will allow there to be a supernatural or 'mystery' aspect to it.

4. Discipleship

Fourthly, all Christians embark on some sort of discipleship. A disciple is a follower of Jesus and discipleship is a catch-all phrase for learning to follow him. Discipleship involves learning how to understand the Bible, how to pray, how to worship, how to care for others and how to do mission together. It can involve Bible-study, small groups, courses, mentoring, spiritual direction, trips and all sorts of things.

5. Mission

As we know, Christians are called to join in with the ongoing mission of God in the world. Local churches will try to do good deeds wherever they can - supporting and visiting the elderly, sick, broken, bereaved, marginalised and hurting; supporting local schools and hospitals; engaging in work with children, families and young people; providing ceremonies for weddings and funerals; creating spaces where people can pray and worship; and so on.

Also, Christians work together on a global scale. As they collectively pray and seek God, they then work together on much larger projects to alleviate poverty, fight injustice and be good stewards of the environment. They often do this by working with and through organisations such as Christian Aid, World Vision, Tearfund and Compassion.

Christians believe that engaging in such missional activities communicates to others something about the nature of God and of his mission in the world. Sometimes they will use words too and this is called evangelism.

6. Fellowship

Christians believe that gathering together is important, not just for the reasons listed so far but also for fellowship. Fellowship is where we mutually encourage each other, listen to God for each other, support each other and pray for each other. It also usually involves food and drink!

So what's next?

I guess the final thing to say is that Christians believe that everyone is called to be part of God's bigger story of Love, the Universe and Everything. We are on the cutting edge of history right now and are called to shape the future. Being a Christian is a way of life, a way of being connected back to the creator. Being a Christian is to have a sense of purpose and direction. Christians believe that we are working together towards a time when God's kingdom - the kingship of Jesus - will come fully. And nearly all Christians believe that this will also be the time when Jesus will return and somehow heaven and earth will be joined together forever. But in the mean-time we have a job to do here on

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earth (as it is in heaven). The invitation to be a Christian is to join in with the ongoing mission of God in the world.

I hope you've enjoyed reading, watching or listening to GLUE. I hope you've learned something about the bigger story we find ourselves in. Bye-bye.

Discussion

1. Let's start off with a fun question.

If you were a crisp, what flavour would you be and why?

2. Christians fall into any or all of four camps: traditional, evangelical, liberal and charismatic.

Why do you think there might be a danger if you fall into one Christian camp at the exclusion of all the others?

3. Christians gather to pray, worship and break bread together.

Why do you think that the style of prayer, worship, and breaking of bread might vary so much from church to church?

4. Christians think that meeting together is important.

Why would Christians have a problem with thinking that church is something that you *go* to?

5. Lots of people don't think that you need God to be a 'good' person.

Why do Christians think that it's important to be connected to God to be a 'good' person?

6. Christians celebrate wherever they see order being brought out of chaos - in people's lives, relationships and in the environment.

In what way are you already joining in with God's mission in the world?

Further Reading

There is a wealth of great books out there from which the themes in GLUE were pinched. Here is a short list of authors I think are worth reading who all contribute something to the idea of a 'Grand Meta-narrative' or overarching story of God and the world. Rather than recommend individual books you might wish to look them up and see what takes your fancy.

Brian McLaren

Brian is a prominent Christian pastor, author, activist and speaker and public theologian. He wrote a trilogy of creative non-fiction called 'A New Kind of Christian' which I found very helpful. His works are very accessible.

www.brianmclaren.net

Ray Vander-Laan

Ray has produced the most excellent set of DVDs that are a wonderful window into the life of the Jewish people and of Jesus. I cannot recommend these enough.

www.followtherabbi.com

Rob Bell

Rob has written some great books and made some engaging videos that help people connect with God.

www.robbell.com

N.T. Wright (Tom Wright)

Tom Wright is a BIG thinker and his books range from big and deep to readable and accessible. If you want to go deeper and want something to chew on, his books are ideal. His book *Simply Jesus* might be a good place to start.

www.ntwrightpage.com

Steve Chalke

Steve's book 'The Lost Message of Jesus' is helpful in explaining something of the big picture and the world of Jesus.

www.oasischurchwaterloo.org