



Stay Alert to the Spirit

Sermon Notes

Week 1: Preparation
Theme Setting the Scene

Last update 13.10.2020

BIBLE



Readings: Mark 1.1–12, Isaiah 57.14–21, Psalm 137.1–6
Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Mark 1.3

MY NOTES



AIMS



- ▶ To reflect on the challenges we face and the pain being endured, and to recognise that this may be a 'Kairos moment' for the Holy Spirit to re-shape us for all that Jesus wants to bring about in our world today.
- ▶ To recognise Jesus' and John the Baptist's ministry happened during a time of political upheaval and disturbance that led to passion for change and revolution.
- ▶ To prepare for the coming weeks and encourage people to believe this can be fruitful time and not just one of disruption and suffering.

STARTER



If this is your first experience of Jesus Shaped People refer to the simple summary included on your notice sheet/bulletin/website/etc. JSP is a 'whole church discipleship adventure'(unpack this briefly) that believes 'discipleship' or 'following Jesus' can be reshaped by a church identifying five key mission priorities we find in Jesus' ministry, and by adopting and embedding these in the life and work of our church. Churches that have embedded JSP into their culture and mission strategy find *Stay Alert to the Spirit* uses the same five JSP priorities to help explore what the Spirit is saying to the church now. Greek has two words for time: *Chronos*—'what time is it?' and *Kairos*—'the time has come'. We suggest now is a 'Kairos moment' to listen to the Spirit of God.

- ▶ **Revelation 2.7: 'Those who have an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches'**

The Book of Revelation was written during a period of extensive persecution of Jews and Christians. Jesus gave a message to the 'angel' of each church, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and urging them to press on. Reflect on the energy among many Christians (and non-Christians) for change and a call to move forward not backward. Perhaps ask a church member to relate to this conviction. Share a couple of other comments you have heard that reinforce this, and not only from Christian conviction.

Listening

Focus on the need for the Church (and churches) to listen to God for his leading during these days, and believe he will be preparing the way for a spiritual renewal—in the church, for the



world. Recall prayer in such times needs to be less about us keeping God up to date and more about our listening to him.



KEY POINTS



Mark 1.1–12: John's ministry of repentance and the baptism of Jesus

Relevant points from this passage:

- ▶ **Prophetic:** John's dad was a priest in Jerusalem but now John is a prophet living in the desert. He's called to a very different work, essential to God's purposes, but he's vulnerable. Compare Paul relinquishing his position and status as a Pharisee, embracing vulnerability as an itinerant preacher.
- ▶ **Expectation:** John preaches with conviction from scripture that a 'Kairos moment' has arrived; Isaiah's message is being fulfilled. People are invited to believe God is doing new things! John is heralding a period of expectation. Recall Isaiah is associated with Jewish exile when Israel lived through great suffering but led toward spiritual restoration. John and Jesus both draw significant inspiration from Isaiah (note the Dead Sea Scrolls from the same period, include lots of portions from Isaiah).
- ▶ **Repentance:** Let's get ready for God's action. 'Repentance' has been misunderstood and associated with negativity. It's time to reclaim it. John urged people to 'make a new beginning', 'embrace a new direction'. John baptises at Bethany beyond the Jordan, a place of new beginnings where Joshua entered the Promised Land and where Elisha took over from Elijah. Bethany means 'place of the poor'.
- ▶ **Response:** A wide and diverse group of people turned up, hungry for change. Mark mentions Judaea and Jerusalem, but John was attracting people from further afield, including Galilean fishermen. Luke tells us that even Roman soldiers and tax collectors came to John (Luke 3.12–14).

Reflect on the significance of these points for today:

- ▶ **Prophetic Ministry** needs resurgence: Think of the early church. Paul describes a balance of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians.4.11). Our ministry focus has a huge priority for priesthood, primarily focused on pastoring and teaching. Are we stifling prophetic imagination? Is the church in need of those called into the desert? Share a story of how spiritual resurgence can be encouraged by new prophets and evangelists modelling the same focus of the likes of Francis of Assisi, John Wesley etc.
- ▶ **Expectation:** Who recognises this as a 'Kairos moment' for positive change? And what does this look like? We'll be considering the features of this in the weeks to come, but tell a few stories from current experience: the implications of the current crisis for climate change, the value we place on people, for growth in neighbourliness and community, for sacrificial caring and service, etc.
- ▶ **Repentance:** who are the change makers? What is the role of the church in what is taking place—have we been silenced? 'What would Jesus do?' Are we ready to embrace a new direction? What do we need to discard? If we are to be 'rebaptised' what is the new direction? In the coming weeks we'll be exploring what we need to let go of, and the new direction we need to embrace. For example, issues that relate to wealth disparity and a constant assumption economic growth is the only answer to human problems; domination of rich over the poor, internationally and domestically; idolatry related to unhealthy preoccupation with church buildings; and status—release from a false valuation of people, 'the last becoming first' etc.
- ▶ **Response:** *Stay Alert to the Spirit* can be a tool to help work out our response to the situation. Over the coming weeks we'll be seeking a receptive spirit to what God is



saying in this pandemic, reconnecting common purpose with all kinds of people feeling a spiritual hunger for change. What have we already felt is God's purpose in all this? And who are we sharing this with?



Isaiah 57.14–21

Throughout *Stay Alert to the Spirit*, we'll add Isaiah to John the Baptist and Jesus to rediscover God's contrasting ways. 57.14–21 reveals:

- ▶ Like John the Baptist our task is to 'build up and prepare the road'. The Babylonians like the Romans were great road builders facilitating travel across their vast empires. We learn to create the conditions for Jesus to journey with us, and be identified, as on the road to Emmaus.
- ▶ God inhabits the spirit of the lowly and the heart of the contrite. Jesus steps into our world and made himself nothing to reveal the nature of God's love and method. We can discover and rediscover much about these things during our *Stay Alert to the Spirit* experience.
- ▶ God is appalled and saddened by the corporate and personal greed of human beings and failure to listen and respond to him—yet he remains committed to heal and comfort us, to use us for peace making far and near so all people everywhere find his healing.
- ▶ The ubiquity of evil presents power seekers opportunities for constant domination and exploitation of others. God's peace eludes them while they undermine and build obstacles in the road of God's purposes.

Psalms 137.1–6

We'll also be using Psalms. A Psalm of Exile (utter catastrophe) reflecting a period of lament as those exiled to Babylon deal with loss of past joy, humiliation, brokenness, and anger. Perhaps our present circumstances can enable God's purposes to speak to our world as the People of God search for ways more closely aligned to the way of his Kingdom. Careful listening is an essential ingredient; we hear the voice of the Spirit through our own inner voice and those around us.

APPLY



We can apply these questions to ourselves and our local community:

1. How are you coping with the loss and changes we're experiencing?
2. What effect has the crisis had on your faith and spiritual life?
3. What have you been discovering in these times? Are you keen that we learn from each other?
4. Could this be a 'Kairos moment' that God wants to use for good?
5. What would you like us to gain from *Stay Alert to the Spirit*?
6. Describe how 'pressing on' instead of 'staying in the same place' might look like for us as a Church?
7. What obstacles do you see that could prevent us going forward?

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