

The Church *is* Here

The Kingdom is breaking through

What we covered last week

- We use the word 'Church' very loosely, with its meaning often drawn from personal experience.
- That scripture speaks to the Church as *Ethnos/Basileia* (citizens of the Kingdom), the body, *Oikos* (household of God) and *Ekklesia* (the called out).
- We saw that each of these titles speak of mission, community, location and intention as central to our understanding of 'Church'.
- That mission is the proclamation and breaking through of God's kingdom.
- That this work is God's work, and will be successful with or without us – but are we a people who want to help?

Opening Devotion

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 22:1-2

What we will explore today

- What is the history and spirit of our community as you understand it?
- How have we each come to be a part of this community, who connected us, what did they speak to in us that has led us to life in faith?
- What is happening in Whangarei that we can speak good news into? Where can the kingdom break through into people's lives?
- What are the gifts and talents God has given us to speak into the life of this city and district?

Our Story

The Anglican Parish of Whangarei has a long history of engagement with the city of Whangarei and the surrounding districts.

- What is a lasting memory of this for you?
- What was your earliest sense of what this community was like?
- What role did the history of this place play in your coming to belong to it?
- What role does the history of the parish play in shaping who we are today?

Our Stories

Our community is made up of individual stories as well. Let some of these questions prompt your discussion over the break.

- Who connected you with the Church, and with this parish in particular?
- What drew you into the Christian story, what made it real for you?
- Who is a significant person that has guided you in your faith journey?
- How has this community nurtured you in your faith journey?
- How do you feel this community nurtures those who are new today?

What's happening in our city?

Our stories confirm that we are part of the Church in this place, this city of Whangarei. Every place is different, with its own particular needs and challenges.

- In your experience and knowledge what are the major societal issues in this place?

Take some time to write these needs on your sticky notes before placing these on the wall. Keep them well spaced apart.

What is 'good news' for this place?

As you look at the needs and challenges you have identified, think about what it would look like to speak 'good news' into them. In response to those challenges, what would the 'kingdom come' look like?

What part could we play in helping this to be a reality?

What gifts has God given us?

God gifts us all in different ways, some are called to be prophets, other apostles, still other plumbers and nurses. What are the gifts God has given you, whether in profession, passion or personality.

Write each of your gifts down on an individual sticky note and place them on the wall sporadically.

Where is God calling to us?

God never calls us to something that is beyond our capability. The gifts and talents needed are often already within us individually and as a community.

Looking at our wall, consider how each of the gifts and talents could help respond to one of our identified societal needs.

When you have done this, move the specific gift or talent to the need you believe it could help address.

How can we respond as a community

Hopefully, we can now see how God has gifted us to respond to the needs of this city. Even from this brief activity, you may now have a greater understanding of how God is calling you in service of the kingdom

- What are some of the ways that we could organise ourselves to connect our gifts and talents with the needs of this city?
- What would you need individually to encourage you to exercise this ministry?
- How can we as a community resource and support you and others in these possible ministries?

What might we look like if we try?

If we were intentional about addressing the needs we have identified, we may begin to look very different.

- Different faces and social groups may appear in the congregation.
- Who we are as individuals and as community may change.
- Our faith may change in light of what we see.
- We may fail.

The energy we feel in considering this is the hope of new life.

What we'll look at next week

Next week we will look at four central realities to the healthy Church that can contribute to the mission of God.

- Reconciled and growing relationship with God
- Reconciled and growing relationship with our church community
- Reconciled and growing relationship with our institutional structure
- Reconciled and growing relationship with the kingdom of God at work in our parish.

This will be the final study of the Parish Lenten Studies Series.