



Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

Lesson 1 - God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 13, 14, 33, 34, 58 and 59

Guide Times

- God – 20 minutes
- Jesus – 40 minutes
- Holy Spirit – 20 minutes

Script

Welcome everyone! This class explores the church's basic beliefs about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one living God who is revealed in Jesus Christ and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. (page 33)

God's continuing presence through the Holy Spirit is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message and beliefs. (page 27)

God

Activity 1 (5 minutes)

You will need Post-it notes, pens and a larger sheet of paper with the title God on it.

Ask everyone to write a word or short phrase which, for them, describes God.

Give the opportunity to share ideas and then stick them onto the larger piece of paper.

Demonstration (5 minutes)

You will need a teacup and saucer, a teapot, a deepish waterproof tray and some water or green tea.

Read the script and demonstrate. Alternatively, ask someone to help you.

Script

There is a story about a university professor who came to a Zen master to ask him about Zen.

The Zen master served him tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he could no longer restrain himself. "It is over-full, no more will go in!"

The Zen Master said, “Like this cup you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I teach you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

(101 Zen Stories, a 1919 compilation of Zen koans from the Meiji era, Japan)

In thinking about the questions ‘What is God like?’ or ‘How would you describe God?’

Henri Nouwen, author, priest and spiritual guide, said,

“God is greater than our minds and cannot be caught or contained within the boundaries of our finite concepts.

God cannot be caught or comprehended in any specific idea, concept, opinion or conviction.

God cannot be defined by any specific emotion or spiritual sensation.

God cannot be identified with good feelings, right intentions, spiritual fervour, generosity of spirit or unconditional love.

God is greater than our minds and greater than our hearts.”

Q. What are your thoughts on the statement ‘God cannot be contained?’

On page 34 of ‘Sharing in Community of Christ’ we read these profound words which echo those of Nouwen’s, **“God, Mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination.”**

Activity (5 minutes) - Together repeat these words about God several times and then reflect on them in silence for a short while. Discuss this statement.

What you believe about God makes a difference to the way you respond to God.

Is this true? (5 minutes)

Script

Like the professor in the story of the Zen master, to seek this incomprehensible God, we must empty ourselves of our preconceptions and be open enough to allow the Trinity to teach us and to reveal themselves to us in deeper and meaningful ways.

Stand and sing ‘Humble yourself before the Lord, He will lift you up.’

Jesus

Script

Throughout history, Christians have sought to describe their faith in Jesus Christ. Traditionally, churches have used statements of belief and confessions of faith to articulate their understanding of Jesus Christ’s person and work, so begins the preamble to the chapter ‘We proclaim Jesus Christ’ (page 58).

Activity (20 minutes) You will need copies of ‘Sharing in Community of Christ’ and the Nicene Creed (see end of these lesson notes).

Compare statements 1-9 on pages 58-60 of 'Sharing in Community of Christ' with the Nicene creed.

Make a list of similarities and differences between the two statements of belief. (This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups)

Q. What do you notice about Statement 3 compared with the Nicene creed?

(The Nicene creed does not include any reference to the life and important work of Jesus in the middle part of his life, statement 3 does.)

Q. Is there a particular statement or phrase that speaks to you at this moment in time?

Script

We proclaim Jesus Christ through local and world -wide evangelism including ministries of invitation, witness, inclusive fellowship, worship, caring and life-long disciple formation. (page20)

Time of sharing (15 minutes)

Is anyone part of the church because of a personal invitation or through someone's personal testimony?

Has anyone been drawn in by inclusive fellowship or worship?

Does anyone have a testimony about being cared for or 'loved' into the church fellowship?

How has someone shared the 'Good News' of Jesus' message to you?

Script

We Share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. I do not give to you as the world gives' John 14 v27 NRSV

Share with your neighbour the things that bring you peace. What is the world's idea of peace? (5 minutes)

Script

Paul's letter to the church at Philippi was written whilst he was in prison. It is known as his 'Joy' letter. The reason for this joy is grounded in his relationship with Christ.

In Philippians 4 v 6-7 we read "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all that he has done. If you do this

you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

Q. Can anyone testify to the truth of this scripture?

Homework - Reflect on this scripture, live it out and see what happens.

The Holy Spirit

Activity (5 minutes) Ask the group to share, orally or pictorially, symbols that represent the Holy Spirit.

Q. What do these symbols tell us about the Holy Spirit?

Script

We believe in the Holy Spirit, giver of life, Holy Wisdom, true God.

The Spirit endows the church for mission, frees the world from sin, injustice and death and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is Working, (page34)

Discuss: Can the mission of the church succeed without the endowment of the Holy Spirit? (5minutes)

The Holy Spirit and the task of the church work together hand in hand.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to enable those who follow Jesus to take the good news of the gospel into the world. Equally the work of the church cannot succeed without the Spirit. The spirit enables God's people to BE God's people.

Sharing (10minutes)

Q. How does the Holy Spirit enable? How does it transform?

Have you ever been enabled or felt transformed by the Holy Spirit?

Script - We can think of the Holy Spirit as the personal presence of God.

Q. What does this mean for us as disciples?

How can we tell if the Holy Spirit is present and working with in us?

Script

As we recognise God's enabling and transforming presence in our own hearts we can learn to recognise the divine presence in the hearts of others.

Community is primarily a quality of the heart. God excludes no one.

The mission of the church, enabled and transformed by the Holy Spirit, is to draw the circle wide and invite all to come to Christ and experience his peace, true shalom.

Sing 'Draw the Circle Wide' (273 in 'Community of Christ Sings')

Nicene Creed

I believe.....in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God,
Begotten, not made,
Begotten of one substance with the Father,
By whom all things were made:
Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
And was made man.
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried,
And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father,
And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead:
Whose kingdom shall have no end.