

A Church of Children

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Preacher: Johan DeJong

[0:00] I think we're quite nice and cold out there.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[3:30] If it can play well, I'm having room to take my place. Well, it's got plenty of light to play. Yeah, that's true.

No, I've got more fingers than it has. I've got more fingers. Yeah, they're humming. Yeah, that's true.

Or a millipede. Yes. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. It's also the longest day.

[6:03] So what a great day for Celebrating Fathers on the longest day of the year. It looks like being quite a warm day as well. So public health advice, keep up your fluids during the day.

I was at a conference last week and it was a warm day and on the table there were bottles of water and also a bottle of squash.

So I thought to myself, oh, I'd love to have a bottle of squash that looks really tasty. So I poured myself a glass of squash thinking this would be great. I will plug this down. I did and discovered it was undiluted squash.

So it was rather powerful. Now the reason why I tell this so clearly is make sure you're drinking squash that has been diluted. But our first song this morning is quite concentrated.

So if it were a squash, it would be a sort of four times the sort of concentration kind of squash. It's got lots of ideas and thoughts. It's a great hymn, but it's one of those hymns that's got lots of thoughts in it.

[7:09] It's called Immortal, Invisible. So if you look at that, there's all kinds of stuff in here. So it describes God as being immortal. He can't die. Invisible, we can't see him. Him being wise.

It talks about him being in light. We can't find him. He's hidden from our eyes. He's blessed. He's glorious. He's the ancient of days. He's almighty, victorious, and his great name we pray.

So it's a very concentrated song we're going to sing first up this morning. So I invite you to stand when the music starts and let's sing and praise God together, who is immortal and invisible.

Immortal, invisible, God of devised, Immortal, invisible, God of devised, And blessed, what's glorious, the ancient of days.

Oh, mighty, victorious, thy name we pray. Immortal, invisible, God of devised, And blessed, the ancient of days.

[8:42] No one sings, no one sings, no one sings, If you do not design. Your justice, my crown, my glory, the love.

Your crown, which are crowned, Your crown, which are crowned, Your beautiful crown. Through all I do, dear.

you Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Please do have a seat. We're going to sing three songs together, but it's warm. I thought I'd let you sit down for the second one. This is something that Jesus said.

[11:10] He said it in Matthew. He was quoting from the Old Testament. And he said, Jesus said, it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

This morning should be all about God. A God with all those qualities that we've just been singing about. Our great God. But however, sometimes, if we're honest, we tend to make it about ourselves.

And this song is a reminder about our true worship. It should be about God. Let's sing When the Music Fades. When the music fades As all is shipped away As our sins become Lord, we just can bring Something that's a word That will burst your heart I'll bring you more than a song For the song in its sound Is nothing more to that we've just been All about you, Jesus I'm sorry Because it's all about you, Jesus For the fountain, Jesus I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I'm waiting For the fountain, for the fountain, Jesus King of endless earth How one will you express, how one will you deserve

Lord, we can hold, all I have is yours Every single breath I'll bring you more than a song For a song in itself It's not what you have required You search much deeper, hidden Through the waiting, to hear You're looking into my heart And I'm loving, my dear All of your own worship And it's all about you All about you, Jesus And it's all about you, Jesus And it's all about you

[14 : 45] All about you, Jesus And it's all about you, Jesus This is a verse from Romans I will not venture to speak of anything except What Christ has accomplished through me So our next song is a song that all that we do or should do should be through Jesus It's a song that reminds us about this But it also contains some lovely promises So shall we stand and sing Yet not I, but through Christ in me What is your grace?

For grace is Jesus, my Redeemer There is an all for heaven that you give It's my joy, my righteousness and freedom My strength was done, my deep and outless sea It's my hope, my hope is only Jesus All my life is only back to him Oh, our change and divine I can sing What is life and the life that you drive to me And now it's dark and I am born for Satan

For by my side, the Saviour he will stay I lay the wrong in weakness and rejoicing For in my need his power is the name To live by all, my shepherd will repent me Through the evil, my shepherd will repent me Through the evil, my shepherd will repent me Oh, my my God, my shepherd will repent me And I shall overcome Yet no time I come to Christ with me I know I am forgiven

The future's sure The price he has been paid For this has changed That suffered for my garden As he was raised To her the world's great Hence my home My spirit was beaten Jesus, now and ever Is my plea Though the chains are released I can sing, I am free And the light that he dies With every breath

I long to follow Jesus For he has said That he will bring me home And day by day I know he will be near me Until I stand Enjoy his own world To bless my home I know he will be near For the glory Ever won't be near When the grace is gone Take care Let the rain come me, till my lips shall repeat, let my mind come to Christ.

[19 : 40] In my home, my heart resumed in the day, all the glory evermore today.

Let the rain come me, till my lips shall repeat, let the light come to Christ.

Let the rain come me, till my lips shall repeat, let the light come to Christ.

Let the light come to Christ. Let the light come to Christ.

We pray this morning and for the rest of our lives that those words will ring true. Yet not I, but through Christ who lives in us. Father, help us to put you first.

[20 : 47] Help us to be less of us and more of you. And whatever we do, to do through your son Jesus, our Lord. Amen. Please do have a seat.

So, stuff, what is happening? First of all, reminder, safeguarding training. There's a session this Wednesday evening. Please, everybody who's involved in youth work or care work, please come on Wednesday.

If you can't, it's repeated on 11th of July. And Katie's asked that it will start at 8 o'clock. So, it's not a kind of Bethel slow arrival. It's kind of, please arrive ready to start for 8 o'clock.

So, if you need to set your watch to 7.45, 7.50, then please do that. And Johan has got a couple of messages for us. Thank you. Hello, folks.

Hello. If you're new here, you're a guest, you're very welcome. Just introduce myself. My name's Johan. I'm part of the leadership team. I just want to share a few things with you. The first is on the 12th of July, so the day after the repeat of the safeguarding training.

[21 : 54] We're meeting at Waverley Abbey House all together as Bible-believing churches in Farnham to worship together, which is usually a wonderful time to sing, to pray, to enjoy each other's company, play some friendly games, beat Jubilee at tug-of-war again, right?

We need your help with that, right? That would be great. What we also need to do is kind of do our bit as a church to try and make this happen. As you can imagine, shifting sort of six churches to Waverley Abbey House requires a bit of organization and effort.

We've sucked our hands up to be stewards this year, which is, compared to doing the kids' work or providing the music, one of the easier jobs. So it would be great if you felt able to just volunteer a little bit extra of your time to make sure that happens safely and smoothly.

If you can do that and you want to know what's involved, please come and talk to James, who's on the drums, and he will inform you further. That would be wonderful. What's the next slide?

Oh, it's Bethany. Okay. I think we know who we are. That's good. We have some thank yous to do. Fiona, where are you? Where's Fiona? Hello. Come and join me.

[22:59] For those of you who don't know Fiona, Fiona has been with us at church for many years. Now, it's easy, if you've been at a church for many, many years, to kind of go, okay, I've done pretty much everything there is to do at this church.

I'm going to take a seat, a back seat, and not do anything now. Fiona has not done that. That's all. For Fiona, there are still unexplored places to serve, aren't there, Fiona?

But one of her ways of serving has been as coordinating deacon for many, many years, and that role is coming to an end. So we just wanted to say thank you, Fiona. Being a deacon is not always an easy job, and it's not an obvious job.

In fact, it involves doing so many of those little things that people don't see. A great example of which was, for instance, playing the piano last week when you weren't actually on the rotor. Is that right?

Yeah. Not seen, not noticed, but there was Fiona helping out, doing extra. I think that's totally typical of Fiona. So we do want to say thank you, and we've just got a little gift for you and a card.

[24:01] Why don't we give Fiona a big gift? Thank you. Thank you. We'll go now.

Okay, yeah, you go. It'd be wonderful if you have picked up on things like Fiona playing last week when she wasn't on the rotor.

If you picked up on things like that, why not go and find Fiona at some point in the next couple of weeks and just say, I saw you do this. Thank you so much. Wouldn't that be a great way to encourage her? Let's just pray for her, shall we?

Lord God, we thank you. Thank you so much for Fiona and everything that she's already been to us, done with us, served us in. Please will you bless her, bless her in her role with Food Bank and in the many other roles that she serves in.

Lord, thank you so much that you give us people, people who love us, people who serve us, people who we can love and serve in return. Thank you that you provide the power for that. So we want to thank you and glorify you for everything that you've done in Fiona and through so many years here at Bethel.

[25:06] In Jesus' name, amen. May also have noticed that there'll be another person who has served at the heart of our church life, stepping down soon, and that's Paula.

We will be thanking her properly and differently later on. But in the meantime, there is a card just by the hatch where you pick up your teas and coffees. It'd be great if when you grab a tea or a coffee, just write a little message in that card for her.

That would be wonderful. It'll be there for the next couple of weeks. Thank you. Thanks, Johanna. In a moment, it is the kids' group. However, before you go, I was wondering if you could do me a favour.

So I'd like, if you're going to any of these kids' groups, please don't go just yet. But could you just stand up? Excellent, thank you. Stand up if you're going to these kids' groups. It's a kind of staged process, the way we're going to exit today. I'd like you to turn around.

Now, all these people who are sitting down, if you could smile nicely at these wonderful children.

Okay? Smile. Now, kids, in a moment, you're going to go out. And I know you're coming back later to share with us.

[26:10] I have seen the script of the play that you're doing, and I am really looking forward to it. But what I would like to do is for us to pray for you. So, if, kids, before you go out, I would like you to look at one of these nice smiley faces, and there are lots.

Someone who isn't a relative. You just go up to them and just say your name. That's all you need to do. There's nothing more embarrassing or horrible than that. Just say that. And then when you've

told them your name, then you can go out. And then those people you've told them, they're going to pray for you as you kind of go out.

Okay? Is that acceptable to do that? Yes. Yes. Okay, so find one of those nice smiley faces that you're not related to. There are lots. There are lots.

And say your name. Okay. Have fun in your groups. Please leave by that door.

So those of you that a child said a name to, Now's the time to pray. If you just, we'll all pray, just silently, about the kids' groups. But if a child said their name, now's the time just to lift that child to God in prayer.

[27 : 26] Let's pray silently together. Come and have a seat.

Come and have a seat.

In a moment, we're going to pray. Then May is going to come and read to us from Matthew. Then Johan is going to come and speak after that.

And then at the end of the service, all those kids are going to come back in. They're going to share what they've been learning over the last few weeks. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you this morning that you are a great God. We thank you that you are immortal, glorious, victorious, almighty.

[28 : 41] We thank you that you're a fountain of goodness and love. We thank you that you're pure and gracious and merciful and just.

Yet, Father, you're humble. We thank you that you stooped down. That you became lonely. You were born in a stable.

You had few belongings. You washed your friend's feet. You thought of others first. Father, help us this morning to acknowledge who you are and to lift you up in our praise and our worship.

Father, help us to be humble just as Jesus was and is. Father, we're sorry for this morning for the times when we do put ourselves first.

When we don't remember who you are and we forget what you have done. Father, we know that you search deep within us. Father, we thank you that as Christians, when you look at our broken and sinful hearts, you see us through the eyes of Jesus.

[29 : 49] Father, we thank you that we're forgiven. Father, we thank you for the grace and the mercy that comes through knowing Jesus. Father, as we long to follow you, may we be guided by you.

May our hope be in you and not in ourselves. Father, may we be firm in knowing that you will not let us go. Father, although that you're a great God, thank you that we can call you Father.

We can call you Abba. Father, as we find life tough, we thank you that in you we have someone who understands, who cares, and who's seen someone who loves suffer.

Father, we pray for all those children who left just a few moments to go. And we're looking forward to them coming back later to share the important truths about you. Father, I've got a few weeks left of Explorer's Term and a few weeks left at school and then the holidays.

Father, we pray that you'll keep them safe. Father, we think of the safeguarding training coming up soon at church. Help us as a community to keep our children safe, but also we recognise it's important, as ambassadors of you, that we do things well in the eyes of the world.

[31 : 09] Father, we thank you for the book of Matthew. Pray now as Johan comes to speak to us from that book.

We thank you that we have an opportunity to read it in language that we can understand. We thank you for your word. And may we be challenged and blessed as we read it together this morning.

So we bring these things before you, the great, immortal, and invisible, and yet loving and kind God. In Jesus' name, Amen. May, I think, I can all read.

Thanks, mate. The reading is taken from Matthew chapter 18, verse 1 to 14.

And that's page 985 of the Church Bibles. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

[32 : 13] At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said, Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble. Such things must come. But woe to the person through whom they come. If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.

[33 : 21] It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my father in heaven.

What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way, your father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. And I will do that, but have a moment.

Thank you.

Great. Wonderful. I see some water coming into the room. That is great. I see some happy conversations happening. I see some faces in quiet repose.

[35 : 38] As you have a moment of reflection to yourself, those are all good things. Let's pray, shall we, as we come to God's word. Father, we thank you. Thank you that you have not left us in silence.

Thank you that you speak to us day by day through your word. We pray, Lord, in the heat. And in the busyness, the warmth of our lives and the swirl of our thoughts, that you would give us cool space for reflection.

Ears that are ready to hear from you. Give us refreshing water, the water of life to drink from your word, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're in Matthew, thinking about how Jesus with us and how we are with Jesus as well, how we are together.

We're thinking about discipleship. And we need, before we grapple with this part of God's word, to do a little bit of text work. Because if you want to understand the Bible, you kind of have to understand how it's put together, don't you?

And the immediate context of what is going on around a bit of the Bible is really important for understanding it right. Just as if, for instance, you opened up a novel and you started reading it chapter 3. Probably going to be a little bit lost, aren't you?

[36 : 46] Unless you're knowing what's happened in chapter 2 and perhaps even what's going to happen in chapter 4. So we're going to do something similar now. We're just going to look and pick up on verse 1. Chapter 18, verse 1. At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And that's a little clue for us that Matthew, Jesus here, is picking up on a conversation that's been bubbling along for quite a long time. It's an underlying conversation about how do things work in God's family?

Who is the greatest? Is it the ones who have just been up the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, Peter, James, John, seen him in his glory? Is it them? Is it Peter, the spokesperson, the one who seems to ask all the questions and get all the answers?

Is he the greatest? Or is it James and John, whose mother is shortly going to come and ask Jesus if they can sit at his left and right hand in the kingdom of heaven?

That's the percolating conversation that's going on. And Jesus says here, no. No, no, it's not like that. It doesn't work like that.

[37 : 56] Jesus' agenda is about how to be family, how to be disciples together. And we know that because in the immediate context come the only two mentions from Jesus' lips of the church in all of the Gospels.

So if you would flick back to chapter 16, he talks about Peter being the rock on which the church is built. If you keep reading in chapter 18, there's a reference to how we're supposed to help each other, deal with each other, when things go basically a bit wonky in the church.

What's it like? Well, it's a bit like this. This is Ernest Shackleton. You probably know, led the Shackleton Polar Expedition 1914 to 1917.

And if you know your history, you know that the amazing thing about this expedition is not that it succeeded. Because it didn't. They never made it to the North Pole, did they? The ship, the Endurance, got stuck in the ice.

It was slowly being crushed. So there was no way to sail home. The only way home was a torturous journey on foot with sleds dragging all the stuff all the way across the ice.

[39:04] And throughout the ordeal, Shackleton's concern was for people's morale and for the strugglers in the group. And so in order to make sure that everybody was okay, he repeatedly adjusted the schedules and who was walking with who and who was in a tent with who and what speed they were going at, all of these things constantly on his mind.

And the upshot and the reason that the Shackleton Expedition is remembered is that every single member of the expedition survived. All of them made it home. And Jesus says, that's church. That's what we're going to see in this passage. It's not about breaking new ground. It's not about winning. It's not about getting big and famous. It's about everyone getting home safe. That's what it's about.

And in our passage, Jesus is effectively saying, look, when I'm gone, you will be a group. You will be the church. You will be distinct.

You will be together. And this is how it should be among you. So this is going to be helpful for us, isn't it? As at Bethel we think about how to love one another, how to deeply know one another, how to care for one another.

[40:14] Because relationships can make or break a church. Can't they? Jesus says here, if we're going to be his disciples together, we need to think of ourselves and care for each other as little children.

And we, in fact, can measure how close we are to Jesus' heart by the way that we care for the littlest ones among us.

That's what Jesus is getting at in our passage here. And he uses that phrase, children and little ones, to talk about us as disciples. May read it, didn't she, in verse 6? If anyone causes one of these little ones, meaning those who believe in him, to stumble.

Can you see? So bear that in mind. When Jesus talks about little ones, he means little disciples.

And there are three simple sections here. Again, if you're looking at a Bible passage, really helpful to think, how does this naturally break up into sections?

Because then you're more likely to get the meaning right. Three sections here, each with its own application at the end. So section 1, verses 1 to 5. Here we are. Jesus loves little disciples.

[41:23] And so should we. Have you noticed that as human beings, we have this fascination with ranking things and measuring things. Who's in the Times 100 rich list?

Who's at the top of your World Cup group? Is it England? Or more importantly, is it the Netherlands? The answer is, yes, yes, we are top. Who got the biggest bonus?

Who will get the best exam results? Those of you who've just finished exams. Who can do the business in front of the cameras? It all boils down to the same thing, doesn't it? Who's the top? Who's the greatest?

And so the disciples ask Jesus, in the kingdom of heaven, verse 1, who then is the greatest? It's not a surprise, is it? We all think in those terms.

We have an unhealthy interest in it, really. And Jesus says, no. No. I don't do things that way.

[42:22] Corrie, could you come and just sit here for a minute? Thank you. Don't worry. All will become clear in just a moment.

Let's read verses 2 to 4 together, shall we? This is how Jesus responds to this question, who is the greatest? He called a little child to him, and he placed the child among them, and he said, truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It's not some romantic notion about children being, you know, the innocence among us, or pure and unsullied until the world spoils them, because the Bible doesn't teach that, does it?

This is about status and power, and in the time when Jesus lived, children had no status and no power. They didn't bring anything but responsibility along with them. Even today, we don't actually love kids because of what they bring to the table, do we?

You know. Their monetizable skills, their investment portfolio, their strategic decision making, because they generally haven't got any of that, because they're children.

[43 : 38] And that's how Jesus loves us. Not because of what we bring to the table, not because of our contribution or our status, but despite the fact that we don't have any.

We can do nothing to earn our place with God or save ourselves. It's Jesus who does that, isn't it? That's so humbling. Corrie, thank you very much. Go and sit down.

What does it look like to follow Jesus like that, in that way? In a way that reflects the fact that we don't bring anything to the table, that we are like children with him.

Well, just think about what happened when I asked Corrie to come and sit up. What did she do? She came when I called. She stayed where I put her, until I said, that's fine, you can go.

And that's exactly what Jesus does. He brings a child, and he says, be like this living example.

Come when you're called. Stay where you're put, until I say otherwise.

[44 : 49] That's what it looks like to live this out. And that's not teaching ignorance and immaturity, is it? It's teaching us to trust, humbly trust Jesus, depend on him, listen to him, obey him, as children do.

See, Jesus reframes the question that the disciples ask, the one that we ask, about who the greatest is going to be. And he changes it from, Lord, when do I get the highest spot?

And he changes it to, Lord, help me in the spot that you've put me. Will you do that, Lord? That's hard, isn't it?

It's not easy. But it is good. It's good. That's how Jesus sees us, and so that's how we're to treat one another. Let's look at verse five.

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me. So, in fact, he doesn't just say, treat one another that way. He says, goes further, he says, how you treat little disciples is kind of like how you treat me.

[45 : 55] Just want to pick up one other thing that Jesus says here. Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Maybe you've been at church for a while. Have you changed? Have you changed? Have you seen a change in your heart moving from, I'm fine, self-sufficiency, to humility and dependence on the Lord Jesus, to knowing that you need him?

Have you gone from someone who says, thank you, God, that I turned out okay, to, sorry, God, that I turned away from you. Help me now to turn back to you.

Have you done that? Have you changed? If you've done that, have you acted on it? Have you told someone? Have you said, I'm with Jesus now, can I be baptised?

Have you joined the other little children? Have you joined the flock? As we'll come to in a moment. Because that's how you get into the kingdom.

[47 : 03] See, the way into the kingdom is to recognise that you bring nothing to Jesus and that you need everything from him. And the way to be in the kingdom is to remember that together.

That that's how we all are with him. Greatness is not leading a Christian nation or a megachurch or something silly like that in the kingdom of God.

It is trusting father. It's like Narnia. Only believing children get into Narnia, right? But once you're in Narnia, every believing child is a king or a queen or a hero or a heroine.

That's what's going on here. Can you hear how much Jesus wants a life of simple trust and love and security for you?

Jesus loves little disciples. Doesn't he? Let's recognise that that's who we are and love each other that way. Jesus loves little disciples. Secondly, Jesus fiercely protects little disciples.

[48 : 15] If you've been following the news at all this week, you will have been aware of the social media ban that's coming in. Under 16, no more social media. And in fact, locally as well, All Hallows have just said that they're going to say no smartphones until sixth form from next year.

I think Heathen probably going to do the same thing. And then if you go wider, the rape gang inquiry has made some people very angry, hasn't it? nothing devastates and outrages and angers us more than when people harm children, children being put in harm's way.

It's good to remember safeguarding training in that context, isn't it? We go to almost any lengths, don't we, to stop kids from getting into harm's way, building protective barriers, nailing the furniture to the wall so that when they climb up the shelves to get the biscuit tin it doesn't fall and crush them. That's how Jesus feels about his little ones. That strength of feeling, his flock, his church, and that's how we should feel about each other too. That strength of feeling.

Let's pick it up at verse 6. If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

[49:40] Woe to the world because of things that cause people to stumble. Such things must come but woe to the person through whom they come. If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. Jesus isn't pulling any punches, is he?

This is strong stuff. He's really serious and he says, you need to be really serious about making sure these little ones don't stumble and that you don't stumble. Stumbling means tripping, hurting yourself, being hindered in your walking towards your destination, doesn't it?

That's what sin does to Christians. Hurts them, hinders them and you can see how Jesus feels about this. He's fiercely protective of us. He doesn't want that for us.

[50:45] And what happens when you do fall? You're in a group of people, you fall, you become the trip hazard, don't you? And so, Jesus applies this to us individually, yes, but also he applies it to us together because we're not little atoms floating around in some empty space, are we?

We are brothers and sisters, we're children together in the same family so when we stumble, what happens? It tends to hurt other people too. Woe to him through whom those dangers come.

Not hard to look around and find people who are really ambitious and need to achieve and if they lose a few people along the way and maybe even step on a few people along the way, well, you know, so be it.

It's just how the world is and you only get one life and you've got to take your chance. Jesus says, no, not in my family. I don't want that. And in here, even if it's not as obvious as that, in here, it's easy to compromise, isn't it, with the things that we know are wrong, the habits we know are unhelpful because we just want to get on with life, enjoy it, have a good time.

That's more important to us, even if we risk the big four. Jesus says, no, that's not the way. Cut that sin out of your life, even if it seems extreme.

[52:13] pain. Like an alcoholic cuts out all alcohol, not because all alcohol is bad, but because all alcohol is bad for her.

And she's sick of stumbling about all the time. Like a doctor cuts out cancer, even though it's painful and sometimes dangerous to do it. Some of those stumbles are obvious, aren't they?

Like addiction, unfaithfulness, abuse, stuff that's, you know, we read the Ten Commandments, we can figure out what's wrong, can't we? But sometimes we can make people stumble just by being too keen on our own agendas.

That's a thing too, isn't it? Pushing it too hard or putting the bar too high for people. We can do that by setting too fast a pace. That's one of the things I have difficulty with, I like to move fast.

But not everybody moves fast, do they? When we question new believers or maybe visitors about obscure points of doctrine, when we criticise the church in front of them or in front of our children, we can even do it by letting a divisive or argumentative person stay in our church.

[53:28] That too is a stumbling block. One commentator goes even further, says this, we put stumbling blocks in people's way if we are not wholehearted in our discipleship of Jesus and not serious about our commitment.

Ouch. In that case, he goes on, we also put stumbling blocks in our own way. End of verse 9, it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Jesus says, you're not serious about dealing with your sin, then you're not serious about your safety or the safety of these my little ones. And that is literally playing with hellfire. According to Jesus.

Can you see how serious Jesus is about protecting you? How much he cares? Jesus fiercely protects little disciples.

So should we. Thirdly, Jesus pursues little disciples who wander and so should we. Look at verse 10, verse 11 onwards.

[54:44] We know this story so well, don't we? Or do we? See, in other Gospels, like Luke, for instance, the focus of this parable is evangelistic.

It's about how Jesus goes out to save the lost. But here, from the context, from what comes immediately afterwards, Jesus retells it for pastoral reasons.

It's not the parable of the lost sheep, it's the parable of the wandering sheep. See, this time it's about an insider being brought back, not an outsider being brought in. It's less about how much Jesus loves the lost.

Of course he does. And more about how we should care for each other when one of us wanders off. Let's read it with that in mind. Pick it up, verse 12. What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one who wandered off?

And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety- excuse me, the ninety-nine that did not wander off.

[55 : 49] Our mind goes to the numbers, doesn't it? Or at least mine does. If your mind's like mine, I'm thinking about ninety-nine and one and trying to make that math sad up. But the eastern shepherd, the original here is, they're actually not really thinking in terms of numbers because the sheep wasn't just a number.

The shepherd would have known the sheep by name, probably, definitely by appearance, by habits, even by parentage. Do we know each other that well?

Well enough to know where someone's lame foot is, who has a tendency to graze where they shouldn't. Well enough to detect change in appearance and habits that might indicate that somebody is going to wander off shortly.

Well enough even to notice when they're not there. We can't do that with everyone, of course, can we? Jesus had twelve disciples and three that he knew really well.

Maybe that's a good pattern. That means really knowing your flock, doesn't it? It means that wholehearted commitment that the commentator was talking about earlier.

[57 : 00] Imagine a conversation with a friend that goes like this and you say, I'm part of this great flock, you know? And your friend says, oh, that sounds interesting, can you tell me about it? And you say, yeah, no, well, I just, I go to a meeting for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning really, most weeks.

Being part of a flock means being together all the time in some way or other, doesn't it? I don't mean we never leave this room, that's not what it means, is it? But it's more than just coming together for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning, that's not being part of a flock, is it?

And that's not us, that's not how we are with each other. And that's right. It's right that we know each other and love each other and are in touch with each other because we're a flock.

That's what Bethel is. Verse 14, in the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

In other words, Jesus is saying, go after that wandering member of the church. Go after them in the same relentless, reckless way that I came after you in a way that wouldn't pass any cost-benefit analysis, right?

[58 : 25] This isn't the world's way, but in a way that shows you are a flock, not a Sunday club. Now, what this doesn't mean is inclusivity at any price.

This is not a mandate, manifesto, to shape the whole church around the one. That's not what's going on here. You end up with a lopsided body that way, don't you, to pick up on another Bible analogy for church.

That's not what it means. It isn't a license to neglect the 99. In fact, the 99, if this ever did happen in reality, were probably left in the sheepfold or with another shepherd because they didn't tend to work alone.

But it is saying that how much our church is like Jesus, loves like Jesus, can be seen in how we treat the one that wanders away, the littlest.

How far are we prepared to go to do that? because Jesus relentlessly, recklessly pursues you as a lost sheep. And that's the love that he wants us to apply to one another.

[59 : 40] And that might mean we need to be more patient with that little brother or sister who keeps doing that annoying thing in church. Loving those with little legs might mean we cover less ground as a church than we hoped.

Maybe. It might even feel like we're going nowhere as a church and making no real difference. And you know what? Not always, but in general, that's okay.

Because the mission is not to reach the North Pole. The mission actually is that we all get home safe. Jesus pursues little disciples who wander, and so should we.

I just want to finish with a little story. family go to the beach, and they walk along the beach. There was a storm the night before, and they find that the beach is covered with starfish, that the storm has washed up.

The little boy picks up one, throws it back, before he's called on by his parents. And his father says to him, why did you bother? I mean, it's not going to make a difference, is it?

[60:50] And the little boy says, made a difference to that one. And that's 50% of what we're talking about here, right? The heart of that child for the one, the one that matters.

But it's only 50%, because actually the truth of the matter is that it matters to the one who made that one. Did you get that? It matters to Jesus.

it matters to Jesus. It doesn't just make a difference to the wandering sheep, it makes a difference to the shepherd, because that's his heart for all of us.

And so that's how we should love one another and live with each other. By the Spirit's power, may that be true of us. Amen. Thanks, Johan.

Do you feel up for a bit more singing? Have you got enough energy in the heat? Yeah. Shall we do that? Let's stand and sing Come People of the Risen King. And then as we sing that, I think the kids are going to come back in.

[62:05] Oh And steady streams of mercy reach me now until the end.

Rejoice, rejoice, let everyone rejoice. One heart, one voice, a gentle night.

The amazing joy is born in church and sweeping through the night.

The amazing man of life was one of the shining and light. For his work and love will never change, but his mercy's ever been.

And all of us will hold our faith to the best of God. Rejoice, rejoice, let everyone rejoice.

[64:03] One heart, one voice, a gentle night. One heart, one voice, a gentle night.

A young and old from every land and a living of the day.

A merciful, a empty hand, by the nations of each place. That by all the world gives me sin to show his end to the truth.

That by all the world gives me sin to show his end to the truth.

Let it be done in life But I, but I Let it be done in life In life, in life Let it be done in life But I, but I Let it be done in life Pleased to have a seat. Come join us kids.

[65:55] We're always this silent and well behaved.

It's a bit much, isn't it, Mom?

It's a bit much, isn't it, Mom?

Thank you. Thank you for waiting, everyone. Okay. So if you guys would like to sit here, sit in your groups.

So, um, and actually just sit in your groups. And then we just need a little bit of space here. Yeah, yeah, stay in your groups.

[68:05] Okay? Okay. Okay. Do you want to go over there? Okay. Thank you for waiting, everybody. We have a presentation for you today about the book of, well, I'm going to say what it's about in a minute.

And we have been practicing. And it's a mixture of speaking and mime. So we hope you can see clearly what's going on.

So what does faith look like in real life? We will answer this question by looking at the book of James. Faith, group one.

Group one. Come and stand at the front, please. Faith action. Faith act.

Can you do the action, Killian? No. Listen to the Bible and do what it says.

[69:22] Listen to the Bible and do what it says. Do not worship idols. No, you cannot worship idols.

End. Thank you very much, group one.

Group two, stand up, please. That is, that's your group, yeah. Okay, so come and stand at the front. Okay, we're going to say this together, aren't we?

And there's another action. Okay, go. Money costs. It's faith costs. Faith costs and get ready, Zach, you've got your line just here.

Okay, so go. Faith costs. Once more, I don't know if we heard that. Okay, go. Faith costs. And we've got an action here. Can you show them the action?

[70:32] Can we all have a go at this action, guys? Okay. True saving faith leads to costly good deeds.

Faith chooses.

Faith chooses. Live like someone who belongs to God, not someone who belongs to the world.

Thank you very much.

So, and the last group, Corrie's group, come on up. Come and stand at the front. Okay.

Faith speaks. Our words show the true state of our hearts.

[72:26] Jesus loves you. Jesus saves. Thank you. Right.

Might just do a little switch. So, Pathfinder Scrambs, could you come this way? And then older ones, could you kind of move that way, please? Can we see if we can? Younger ones come this way towards me, and then older ones sort of go that way.

You go round to the back. You go round to the back. We'll do like a little circle. Amazing. Thank you. That's it. We come this way. Thank you, Tobias. That's it. Lovely. That's it.

Well done. Bye. That's it. All right. That's it. We'll come along here, and we can stand up. It's okay.

We can stand up. Stand up. That's it. Here.

That's it. Well done, Hibby. That's great. Lovely. Have I got everything? Have I got everything?

Have I got everything? Come on. Come and join us.

[73:27] That's amazing. Oh, this way, my darling. See? Oh, it's a mum. Fine. Absolutely fine.

Absolutely fine. Lovely. Okay. Right. We're going to do our next one.

Ready? Ready? Wait. Jesus is coming back so wait patiently even though things are hard.

Whatever is happening, pray confidently, because God hears and answers.

Well done. Amazing. We've got a little bit more. Where's Daisy? Daisy, come here. Daisy's going to tell us a little story about praying, okay?

That's hot off the press this week. Okay, Daisy, where are you? Lovely. What happened this week to your little sister? Yeah. When mummy told me to close the door at dinner time, I closed the door.

[75:12] Then I didn't look at Poppy's finger pointing out. And then I slammed it in there and Poppy was screaming as she put some cold peas on her finger.

And then I prayed. But what, oh yes, this is the key bit. This is the key bit, everybody. What did you do, Daisy? I prayed. Yeah, well done. She prayed that it would be better because we looked at, now Kayla's going to, Hezekiah, going to hold this up between you.

Hold this up really high. That's it. Last week we were looking at prayer. And they all looked at things, sometimes we pray because things are a bit tricky. And sometimes we pray because things are, to be thankful, joyful things.

And they all did their handprints and wrote some lovely prayers. So we'll leave this at the front. You can have a look at it afterwards. So, and Poppy did a lovely example. She prayed when things were tricky this week, which was lovely.

So, and now Edie is going to just do, where's Edie? She's just going to close in prayer for us. Dear Lord, thank you for giving us the Bible where James shows us how to be good and nice and live out our faith. Amen.

[76:26] Amen. Amen. Would you like to do the song? Yeah. We're just going to do, we haven't looked at this song loads, but this song links with the teaching we've been done.

So we're just going to do the first verse and the chorus. Perhaps you might notice some of the key words that the children have said. James is top tips, so faith acts, it speaks, it prays. And perhaps if you see those words in the song, maybe you could think of an action.

Kids are done. Yeah, we just need this down. Sorry. That's it.

And all those who can stand up, you don't have the action. But you can pick some of your actions that you've just done. But you can do some of your actions that you've been doing.

Give me a faithful Lord to shape my heart.

[77:38] Give me a faith to fill me completely. Give me a faithful Lord for each new day.

Faith that I need for action. To love the world in the Jesus great. Give me a little faith to change me.

I want a faithful reach as deep. All ahead to solve the Jesus completely. I want a faithful faith to move me.

I want to go where you might lead. All ahead to solve the Jesus. With a mountain moving, living faith in me.

I want a faithful faith to move me. I want a faithful faith to move me.

[78:40] I want a faithful faith to move me. I want a faithful faith to move me. So, thank you very much for that. I had a front row seat. If it was in the theatre, I'd have paid a lot of money for that seat. Thank you for all your reading and acting.

That was great. I wonder whether sometimes I could come into your explorers or explosions group sometime. It looks really good fun. I think we should also give a big round of applause to all the blue tops. Some are out there.

Because each week they do this. A big round of applause for all the blue tops. So, in a moment, we'll be able to get tea and coffee.

Why don't I just pray at the end of our service? Father, we thank you for our time this morning. We thank you for faith. We thank you that you give us faith.

We thank you for these children here and their leaders and how they've been putting faith into action. Father, we pray that all of us might learn something from that this week and help us to put our own faith into action as we serve you.

[79:43] So, we bring these things before you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.