

Good God, Good Church - 9th January 2022

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[0 : 0 0] hey everyone my name's matt the vigorous and john's good to be with you today as we're back with another little youtube offering to hopefully add a bit of flavor to our faith in these early weeks of 2022 we're slowly cautiously easing our way back into gathered church life over these coming weeks but in the absence of in-person services on sunday mornings this week and next it's an opportunity for us to pull up an online pew together in a slightly more personal way how you doing it's a mighty strange january we're having a mix maybe of new year momentum of wanting to get on with things all the while coupled with covid case increases and the undercurrent of infection and the tension which comes with that all sorts of people who are under the weather at the moment maybe you yourself are suffering or isolating my sympathies if so in our house well we've somehow escaped infection so far but with the kids back in school and their friends going through it it does seem to be just a matter of time that impending reality well as i say it's a strange old situation to be in so much uncertainty and yeah morning by morning day by day week by week there's a need for us to not plod on in our own power but instead to seek the strength of the one who saves us from despair indeed god this life would be nothing without you for you are life itself the one from whom and in whom we know our place as people created and cared for by you assure us minute by minute the days are beginning to get longer and the light of the sun slowly lifts higher in the sky so is your faithfulness to us you are the solid rock in the midst of so much else that is shifting so may we rely on you for our well-being we pray that well-being is nurtured in all sorts of ways not least by those who you've given us to share this life with so during these unsettled times especially in these unsettled times would you give us the energy the inclination the compassionate commitment to be the support for each other that we need speak to us now in what we're going to explore today that your guiding light may illuminate our lives we pray thank you god amen okie cokey let's put our whole self into this new season ahead of us because whether we're talking like this or recording our in-person church services to then stick up here on youtube over the next couple of months the plan is to be thinking about what it means to be good and in particular what it means to be a good church now this word good it's one of those words which covers all sorts of bases so literally anything can be described as being good these days from having a good day or a good night out from good food to good sex from a good goal for west ham obviously to watching a good band play a good song in a good venue from having a good cup of tea to finding some good bargains which are a good fit for a feel-good film to

good health from a good school to a good look to a good book and it's not just objects or experiences which can be described as good nah so children are commended for being good a friend might be a good mate a parent might be a good dad or a good mum if we're asked how we are we may well reply i'm good thanks and so on and so on it's a word which can be applied so broadly that it can become a bit of a bland description you know how was it it was good can be a bit of an underwhelming word therefore so we might add a so in there sometimes you know ah that is so good or we add some intensity to it maybe if we're really impressed you might say blimey that was good yeah good is therefore an incredibly versatile word which perhaps helps to explain why it's so common in our conversation but it also seems to be a very subjective word because what's reckoned to be good by you may not necessarily seem good to me and this subjectivity is no surprise since we can define the word good as meaning very satisfactory enjoyable pleasant or interesting and you'll know as well as me will each vary hugely in the kinds of things we find enjoyable or pleasing i mean give me a skanky pub over a poncy cream tea any day but you may well beg to differ i guess that's why building community finding common ground can sometimes be such a tricky task because by its very nature we'll each have different ideas about what a good life looks like indeed in terms of church community life i think that's why if i'm honest i sometimes wince

a bit at that call and response that some church leaders get their congregations to join in with you know that god is good all the time all the time god is good saying you know as we'll explore over these weeks god is indeed good and i believe that wholeheartedly but chance like that god is good all the time one well it sometimes feels a bit tone deaf almost to those who may not be feeling like god is good all the time particularly if they're struggling to come to terms with grief or loneliness or abuse in fact i sometimes toy with the idea of introducing a less alliterative but perhaps more inclusive chance so something like god is baffling all the time all the time god is baffling you see who says i don't do liturgy but i guess my point is that sometimes i wonder if there's a risk of subjectivity creeping into our worship you know we tend to find it easier to instinctively declare god is good when life is generally going well in effect when we agree with how we feel god is doing things in contrast it's much harder impossible but much harder to say god is good with any gusto when we're faced with tragedy or pain or loss it's not that god is not good in no circumstances but the subjective nature of our understanding of what what makes something good you know what makes it very satisfactory enjoyable pleasant or interesting well that means that god's goodness may not always be the go-to timeless quality of god's which we find most helpful to reflect on in those toughest of times you could argue it should be because god is good all the time but good as i'm saying is such a subjective term i wonder if we do well to somehow reset our understanding of it indeed with this in mind what i'd like us to explore over these next few weeks is how we might come to a deeper understanding of this word good a deeper understanding which is not perhaps shaped by our own subjective feelings you know our own opinions but rather a more objective understanding of what god's goodness is really all about and as we do that we'll be exploring how we as a church might better reflect that objective goodness in how we go about our common life together under god we'll be drawing a little bit on a book by scott mcknight and laura barringer called a church called tov tov being the hebrew word which we translate as good in our bibles in the book mcknight and barringer identify seven headings of what being a good church under a good god is all about yes settling on these seven headings may in itself be a subjective act i suppose but they're all qualities as we'll see which are not abstract but rooted in the lived experience and example of jesus himself and so over these next seven weeks we'll be thinking about these things empathy and compassion grace and graciousness the importance of prioritizing people truth-telling justice service before concluding the series by looking at the importance of christ-likeness what makes for a good church well that's our task to work out with god and yet what's worth acknowledging i think as we begin that task is that we'll each come to that question with very different experiences and even preconceived ideas about what a good church is for some the definition of a good church will be based on the style and content of the worship you know the music the words the prayers the way communion is shared and so on for others a good church may be defined by the aesthetics you know the building the sights the sounds the smells the importance of the whole multi-sensory experience for engagement with god still for others the social action of a church is all important where community transformation is the priority and everything should therefore be geared towards that end for some the preaching and teaching may be key so the importance of sound biblical doctrine applied to everyday life is emphasized but then again others may feel that it's the people who make up a church who are central the pastoral care the social interaction the way children are nurtured the way lives are shared the chance maybe to meet a partner and so on are what makes for a good church so the worship the setting the social action the teaching the people i guess most of us would say a good church is a mix of all those things and much more but the fact we'd all have slightly different opinions on the relative importance of each of these aspects simply underlines once again how subjective this word good is how subjective it is to settle on what makes for a very satisfactory enjoyable pleasant or interesting church it'd be a bit like a round of family fortunes where we asked a hundred people what makes for a good church you can guarantee there'd be a list on the board as long as your arm although hopefully no one's response would get a and so i guess the question is how might we ensure that we don't let our naturally subjective opinions about what makes church good get in a way of seeking an objective answer based on the lived experience and example of jesus well it seems to me that as we reflect on these seven areas over the coming weeks it'd serve us well to ensure that our community life is rooted in good communication with each other good communication if you like for the common good indeed in a book of proverbs in particular good speech good words between us are seen as an essential part of a faith-filled life so we read for example in proverbs 12 14 from the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things or in proverbs

15 23 it says a person finds joy in giving an apt reply and how good is a timely word word well how about this from proverbs 15 30 light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart and good news gives health to the bones yeah all verses full of good wisdom there and yet if i'm honest i do feel like over the last couple of years that my conversational ability you know my listening skills my bank of stories my energy for small talk well it's taken a bit of a battering whether it's the fact i feel less socially match fit whether it's the masks and social distancing we're still experiencing whether it's a lack of confidence because i don't really feel i've been up to much that would be of interest to other people and i feel i've become wow just a bit boring really or whether there's a general flatness which hinders banter and joking around i don't know but for me i feel that good conversation good communication is something that i'll need almost to relearn how to relax into in the coming months perhaps you recognize that in yourself too in a way i hope so otherwise it really is just me who's become boring but i wonder as well if the general lack of confidence many of us might be feeling has contributed to the more polarizing way people sometimes seem these days to be engaging with each other where tempers seem a bit shorter disagreements seem a bit tetchier opinions just a bit more forthright you know particularly online than may be helpful i'm reminded of a another verse in proverbs which says this anxiety in a person's heart weighs them down but a good word makes them glad carrying anxiety does indeed weigh us down and yet i wonder if the lack of opportunity sometimes to receive a good word in person can simply compound that sense of detachment and so how might we address all this well i came across something the other day which i thought would be worth sharing as a kind of blueprint for good communication particularly for when we encounter others with different opinions as we surely will when we consider what it means to be a good church it's a blueprint from an organization called vote common good an american movement designed to help people of faith prioritize the common good when working out how to vote as such it's based in politics but for me these principles are applicable far beyond just political conversation and so with the help of the author and speaker brian mclaren vote common good put together what they call the six commitments of common good communication see what you make to these firstly example i will demonstrate and lead by example in my communication in public and in private when i fall short i'll admit it apologize and reaffirm my commitment to lead by example secondly curiosity i will show uncommon curiosity by asking honest questions staying open to new information seeking to understand others as i would want to be understood and listening with empathy thirdly clarity i won't hold back speak half-truths be intentionally vague or attempt to deceive i will share my feelings and my underlying values whenever possible fourthly decency i will strive to show genuine courtesy and respect towards everyone especially when we disagree i will not mock call names or dehumanize any person or group fifthly fairness i will practice basic fairness in these five ways i won't compare my best with someone else's worst i will not assume the worst motives in someone else i will acknowledge the upsides and downsides of all positions i will praise my counterparts when they deserve it and challenge my allies when they deserve it i will notice who isn't at the table and i will do my part to be sure they are included and heard and then sixthly persistence i expect this work to be hard and i know we'll all make mistakes i will stay in the room with difference be resilient after failure never giving up and always seeking the common good fair few words there i don't know what you make of those you can see i guess they're rooted in politics and how good would it be if our politicians followed

[20 : 11] even some of those principles more closely but these six ways to communicate for the common good valuing example curiosity clarity decency fairness and persistence they're all good qualities for us all to adopt qualities which i'd say will contribute to our conversation and communication being good being very satisfactory enjoyable pleasant or interesting as it says in ephesians let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear and i wonder for you i wonder for me that as this new year gets into gear what would it mean for our conversation to only be such as is good for building up conversation which gives grace to those who hear it you see as we begin to tentatively take steps to resume our gathered life in this new year to look forward in hope to a time when the lessening severity of the virus makes properly shared life a more realistic possibility i imagine we'll each be coming together with a need to get socially match fit after such a long time of disruption we'll maybe need to relearn what it means to communicate well in person communication which may well be shaped at least initially by anxiety by diminished levels of self-confidence communication which may well be hampered by the fatigue which comes with long covid and yet as that proverb reassures us even if we do arrive weighed down by anxiety a good word makes us

glad ultimately of course our good words are inspired by the word of god himself jesus the one who speaks goodness and love into our lives and we'll be looking at jesus in the weeks to come as we work out how to be a good church rooted in principles of empathy and compassion grace of prioritizing people truth-telling justice service and christ-likeness but for now for this week and for this new year ahead let's ask god to help us to communicate well with each other to value example curiosity clarity decency fairness and persistence to have good conversations in every sense of that word as a wise man once said it's good to talk but let's also seek god's help in making sure that our talk is good good talk which will make us and god glad so with all that in mind and looking ahead to our year as a church with god to come the saint john's band have this week recorded a version of a classic hymn whose focus is very much on the marvelous wonderful love of jesus it's the song i stand amazed in the presence

of jesus the nazarene and wonder how he could lie of me a sinner condemned unclean singing how marvelous how wonderful and my song shall ever be how marvelous how wonderful is my savior's love for me for me he took my sins and my sorrows he made them his very own he bore the burden to calvary and suffered and died alone he took my sins and his very own and he died alone and he died alone singing how marvelous how marvelous how wonderful and my song shall ever be how marvelous how wonderful is my savior's love for me for me for me from the grace of swords to never be halls to affore and then ray her son and holy shall have good doubts and seek his face in gu Vita formation and luke in gu. em.

or loke home horde To sing of His love for me We're singing how marvelous, how wonderful And my song shall ever be How marvelous, how wonderful Is my Savior's love for me For me Your love will be my strength How marvelous, how wonderful And my song shall ever be How marvelous, how wonderful

Is my Savior's love for me Marvellous indeed Thanks very much indeed to the band And that song's been added to our Worship Songs playlist on our YouTube channel here So do make the most of that And although we're in person at 6 o'clock both this evening And next week at St John's We're not having Sunday morning services on this, the 9th or next week the 16th of January But all being well We'll be back in person at 10am from Sunday the 23rd Our 10am Monday service kicks off again tomorrow though So if you're around it'd be great to see you there In general I'll keep us posted on here on Facebook and on our church website

But in the meantime we'll be back with another YouTube session next Sunday As will Lottie with another Shooting Stars session as well as her new session Which has been uploaded today Until next time though Let's go with a word of blessing over us May the blessing of God Almighty The Father, Son and Holy Spirit May that blessing be with you and with me And those who God has given us to love and live alongside And may that blessing ensure That the words of our mouths And the thoughts of our hearts Are pleasing In your sight O God Our Rock And our Redeemer Amen Amen

[30 : 06] Amen Amen Amen Amen Pastor Amen Amen Amen Yeah