

# Knowing Me, Knowing You: Q&A; - 10th July 2022

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Preachers: Matt Wallace, Nigel Procter

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now I'm just going to pose some of the questions which have come in and I'll do my best to respond to those. I appreciate it would have been great to have Ruth as well. So maybe we'll do something in a similar vein in the coming months to hear Ruth's take on things.

Just to say at the top as well, these aren't definitive answers, obviously. It's just my take on things, but hopefully this will be worthwhile. But it's part of an ongoing conversation between all of us. So if there's things which come up which you'd like us to explore more, we might talk about that in a bit.

We can gladly do that. We've had a good few range of questions come in. Good morning everyone. Good morning. And just to make Matt nice and comfortable, I'd give him a round of applause for his birthday.

Thank you. Happy birthday Matt. There you go. So over half of us will have known Matt for the 11 years he's now been at St John's.

Some of you know him from before, his time at Aldridge. And some of you might have only come across him during his YouTube through lockdown. But we're going to find out a little bit more about Matt.

[ 1 : 0 3 ] So first of all, we want to know, growing up, what did you want to do as a job? What did you want to be? What did you want to be? Growing up, I wanted to be a writer initially.

I was quite into stories and stuff as a kid. Roald Dahl was kind of a bit of a hero of mine. And I wanted to be an author, I suppose, in sort of early years. But I think as I grew up, I realised that would be a little bit dull, really.

So I've had various career choices that I think I've got into retail after school and was managing an HMV and stuff, record shop for a time and so on, which was fun. But really, in that time, I fancied being a pub landlord.

That was a dream. It's a fine line between a pub landlord and a vicar, really, I tell you, in many ways. But that was something. I also fancied being an archaeologist for a while, like Time Team and digging up things.

My back wouldn't have held up with that. But the other thing that I think in recent years I've rediscovered, I used to make tapes as a kid, radio shows, me and my sister. We called it Radio Mac, Matthew and Caroline. And then we get this, like, double tape deck going on doing little radio shows.

[ 2 : 0 2 ] And I think during lockdown I've realised, I think I'd have loved overall to have been a radio presenter and played my own tunes in my own taste and had some hello to all you truckers out there kind of stuff in the evening.

So some radio DJ or presenter would have been my dream job, I think. So then you started in youth work. Yeah. And then what made you want to become a vicar?

I object to the question because I'm not sure I did ever want to become a vicar, really. So I was a youth worker over in Aldridge for five years working for a church over there.

And really it was the guy who was the vicar there at the time, a guy called Richard, who showed me that you can be normal and be a vicar, I suppose. A vicar? Yeah, exactly.

That's the high bar. It's a dream. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But he was very down to a very normal kind of guy. And the perception, I suppose, of vicars and so on is that you have to be detached from reality a little bit.

[ 3 : 01 ] And wearing different clothes and all that kind of stuff. But he was very, very down to earth. Who he was on a Saturday was the same who he was on a Sunday. Gave me a sort of realisation that you can do it and do it your own way if that's what God calls you to do.

And it seems that that was the path God had for me through various people suggesting things in a growing sense that this is what God's got. I'm not sure if I want to be a vicar. I'm not sure I particularly would choose to do it because it's not an easy job.

But what job is in some ways? I'm glad I'm here. But I'm not sure I can see myself being a vicar anywhere else. If I wasn't here, I don't know what I'd do. So we'll trust God for the future with whatever that brings. But it was seeing it done in a way that was with authenticity, I suppose, which was key for me.

And is that one of the reasons we don't see many cassocks, collars and capes here? Yeah. Too hot for that polyester blend for me. We don't use the robes.

We don't collar. Do occasionally for funerals if you have to look the part a little bit more and so on. But for me, each church to their own, each minister to their own. But for me, I don't really want to be any different on a Sunday than I am midweek.

[ 4 : 06 ] So to put on different clothes would feel very weird, really, for me. And I think that works in this context. If I was in a really high church or cathedral setting or something, you'd probably have to dress up.

And I understand that because it's a different kind of building. But for here, for context reasons, it's my preference. And it seems to work around here. People know me as Matt. They know I'm a vicar locally.

I don't need to wear a strip of white plastic around my neck to have that identity, I suppose. And also, the whole idea of church, I think, is that everyone's in it together. So if some people look different and dress differently, it kind of gives the impression there's two tiers.

And that's the last thing we want to create, really, all in it together. Yeah. So at St John's, neither you nor Ruth fit into this stereotypical image of a vicar and a curate.

Yeah. Why is this? Why is this? I think it's partly because what I said in terms of wanting to make sure that there's no impression that I'm any different to you. I'm not at all. It's really this idea of a shared sense of mission together.

[ 5 : 09 ] But also in terms of those outside of our gatherings, I find it much easier to relate to people if I'm myself. And if I worry about trying to put on a role, then they'll smell a rat a mile off if they're not.

I mean, church is hard enough for people to get their heads around anyway. I wouldn't want to put any other barriers between people encountering God through church. So try and be down to earth. Try and be normal. Try and be myself.

I think we've seen in politics, if you're not yourself, if you're not authentic, you're going to get found out. And I'd much rather keep it real, shall we say. And Ruth's the same. She's a different kind of church background to me. But she liked that community sense and down to earth, informal style of doing things.

Whereas a lot of her colleagues, they're all robed and dressed up and doing very different ways of doing things. But she's enjoying her time here in terms of exploring what it means to be a minister in a way that isn't outwardly recognisable.

But it's hopefully in a community in a way that makes a difference in people's lives. So, yeah. This is weird being interviewed. Sorry, mate. Go on. Well, here's a bit of an easier one for you then.

[ 6 : 16 ] More traditional, more tea vicar. Somebody wants to know, why should St John's invest in a decent coffee machine? Yeah, yeah. Should they?

Shouldn't they? I think we probably should. I don't drink tea or coffee, so I'm a rotten vicar in that sense as well. More tea vicar doesn't apply to me. I do drink soft drinks. Hence, we've got a fridge, basically. But I know there's a lot of coffee aficionados and wannabe baristas among us.

So, if you feel led that coffee's your thing, by all means, you can sponsor a new gizmo if we want to get one. It's just finding the right ones for the right cost that enables us to do the right number of coffees that doesn't need a huge amount of clearing up on a Sunday.

So, if coffee's your thing, by all means, come and have a chat. And we'll speak to Jay, our treasurer, about releasing some funds to make that happen. But a bar could be an option as well.

I don't know. I'm just throwing that one out there. That might be a step too far for me to introduce, but give me another 11 years, we might get there. Yeah, we did have to stop Matt having a top shelf in the fridge just for a beer.

[ 7 : 20 ] But let's move on to more serious. Well, can we? Yeah. Can we? So, why and how should we evangelise, presuming we should?

Yeah. I think for me, it all stems from what evangelism means. So, it's from a, as far as I understand it, from a Greek word, euangelion, which basically means good news.

So, evangelism, this idea of sharing God with people, it's got to be good news. That's the bottom line. It can't be about putting fear into people about what might happen if they don't receive God.

It's got to be positive. And when I look at Jesus, it's a very positive message. It's come to me all who are weary. I'll give you life in all its fullness. All that kind of stuff. As we were praying earlier, you know, meeting with the ones who are on the bottom rungs of society, on the fringes and so on.

He was all about including those who otherwise might not be included. And that, to me, is what evangelism is. It's sharing the goodness of God's love with people.

[ 8 : 26 ] And all of us are called to do that. Now, as a church, if you've been with us any time, we don't do the kind of traditional evangelistic stuff here. We don't preach on street corners.

We don't leaflet drop around a parish. We don't do the things that would normally be seen in generations past as a way to help people understand God's good news for them.

Instead, what's the question? How and why should we evangelize? I think, for me, it's all about relationship. It's got to be what we call relational evangelism.

So if people are going to understand the reality and the truth of God's love in our lives, we live it and we show it and we demonstrate it. And we can almost do that without telling people why we're doing it.

And then in my experience, that intrigues people. Because to be kind and generous and compassionate in a way that is inspired by Jesus is, as I say, intriguing.

[ 9 : 22 ] I think ultimately it's winsome and enticing for people. I get that down a bit. There's various times when people don't understand why we do what we do here.

We'll start playing the park in a couple of weeks. Now, we're going to give away probably a thousand burgers. That's going to cost us. But that's part of the good news, the generosity of God. But we're not going to have a big banner saying we're doing this because we're St. John's Community Church and God calls us to be generous.

You know, we wouldn't do that. That we're simply doing it as a gift and not even going to flyer it. It's just going to be a conversational kind of thing. And people say, why are you giving this for free? Because we love you.

Because this is our town. We want to share with you because that's what we're called to do. And in that integrity, I think that authenticity again, that in time provokes conversations. And the conversations lead to you then being able to say, this is why we value generosity.

This is why we value sharing. Because we've got a God who loves us to bits more than we will ever know. And if you want to know more, I can tell you the stories in my life and dozens and dozens of other people's lives.

[ 10 : 24 ] So it's all about our story reflecting the story of God's love in our lives. That's how I say I would see evangelism working. It's hard work though. Because you can't just give a leaflet and walk away.

You've got to actually be friends with people and know them and live authentically. And that's where your prayer life and your church life helps to do that. So I know I'm on show as a Christian, as we all are.

If people know we've got people of faith, there's a pressure to that because we don't want to let God down. And yet, part of the times when we do make mistakes, I think it's being open with people and saying, yeah, I'm not perfect, but God loves me still.

And God loves you. No matter what you've done, everyone's in. And everyone's invited in. And that to me is good news. Yeah. Yeah, and that's not just as a church.

That's how you live your life, how to church as well. I try. For everyone, yeah. Yeah. So someone would like you to explain the concept of salvation. Two minutes.

[ 11 : 26 ] In two minutes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. So salvation is rooted in the idea of what it means to be saved.

Same sort of word roots to that word. And I guess it all depends. If we understand salvation, it depends on what we think by what it means to be saved. Now, I think historically and traditionally, people would say salvation is all about being saved from going to hell, basically, from being condemned.

And you're saved from that inevitable destruction. If you give your life to Jesus and you accept him as Lord and Savior, then you get to go to heaven. You're saved from hell. And yet, I don't necessarily see it like that.

I see it as salvation being we're saved not from God's anger in that sense or wanting to cast us aside. We're saved from, if you like, ourselves and our own ability to not put God first.

We're saved from the despair which comes with that. That's saved from. We're not saved from God. We're saved from ourselves, I think. And we're saved for a relationship with God.

[ 12 : 38 ] So that's what salvation is to me. It's a much more positive good news thing in that we're saved for the purpose of knowing God and knowing God's love in our life and how to live it. And we kind of associate being saved with what it means once we die.

Do we go to heaven and so on? By and large, I think that's God's issue to work out. That doesn't motivate me. I'm not motivated by sharing the good news because I want people primarily to go to heaven.

I'm motivated to share the good news with people because I want them to know Jesus in their life. And God will work out the eternity of that, I'm sure. But for me, being saved from ourselves for a new purpose is I think salvation starts now.

And there's a chance to be saved now. And the reason I say that is stories like Zacchaeus. Because when Jesus says, I want to come to your house for tea, Zacchaeus, he says, salvation has come to this house today.

It starts now. And that's the way I think Jesus models it. Not pie in the sky when you die, but a reality of God's love shaping our life in the here and now. Yes, I think that does apply anywhere along your journey.

[ 13 : 49 ] The more you learn, the more you're putting into practice, the more... Yeah. Yeah. All right. So how does God respond to injustice?

Or should we challenge wrongdoing when we see it? Yeah. It can't be good news if there's nothing that it doesn't counter, I suppose. So I think, again, this picture of a sort of angry God, often we grow up with or we might have inherited.

I think God does get angry and righteously angry at injustice as the main thing that gets God's goat, I suppose. Because it's all about those who haven't got a chance to defend themselves and are oppressed, not having someone to defend them and to lift them up.

And that's what Jesus does, especially on the cross. So I think injustice is the thing which breaks God's heart the most. I read an interesting thing the other day.

I think that story of Moses when he goes up the mountain to meet with God in Exodus. And we're told that he can't look at the face of God because it would zap him, basically.

[ 14 : 58 ] It would be too overwhelming for Moses to see God face to face. And we kind of interpret that story as thinking, well, God's so holy and Moses is such a worm that he would just be like frazzled if he was in God's holiness in that proximity.

And yet I'm not sure that's the case because the disciples could look at Jesus in the eye and they weren't zapped. I don't think God's holiness is the thing which zaps us, if you like, if we're in his presence.

I think there's an understanding where Moses goes up the mountain, the reason he can't look at God face to face is because he couldn't handle the anguish which would be in God's face at all the injustice and the pain that God was aware of in the world around him.

That would overwhelm Moses to the extent that he would just be blitzed by it. And I think when I picture Jesus, I want to see Jesus smiling and I want to see Jesus a person of joy.

And often I do, but I don't want to not see Jesus as a person who's weeping as well and whose heart is broken for things that ideally should break ours as well.

[ 16 : 04 ] So it's a tension there between a joyful God and a pained God. And I think that's where it all comes together on the cross because that's the reason I would suggest Jesus died, to make things right.

And you get all the pain put on Jesus that represents the pain of that injustice, but you get the joy of the resurrection as well, that it's not the end. So, yeah, for me, justice is at the heart of good news, has to be, especially for those who haven't got a voice for themselves.

They're not easy questions, some of these. No, thanks for these. I like the Morty Vicar one. That was all right. So, are there absolute truths or is everything interpretation?

Absolute truths, everything interpretation. Okay. I talked about this actually a couple of months ago, truth on a Sunday. And my understanding of truth, and you may have your own. This is my interpretation of truth, I think, which I've picked up over the years.

There's three ways to think about truth, particularly as we read the Bible. So, there's truth as fact. Like, it's a fact, I'm sitting on a chair.

[ 17 : 13 ] It's a fact, my name is Matt. There's things that are observable. Facts. It's true. They've got the leaves on the trees. The sky is blue. From our perception, that's true. It's a fact. And there's various things in the Bible that talk about truth as fact in that.

Then you've got another way of understanding truth as meaning. So, this is kind of universal truth about what it means to have a story that's not a true story.

Something like the prodigal son. It's a made-up story. But there's truth in that story about who God is and how he would want us to relate to him in the character of God. So, it's not a true story, but there's truth in that story.

Truth as meaning, if you like. And then the third way to understand truth is truth as wisdom in terms of how we're to live out.

So, the prodigal son, take that. It's not a true story, but there's meaning in it. But actually, truth as wisdom says, what difference does that make to us? How are we going to live our lives in accordance with the truth that's been revealed in that story?

[ 18 : 12 ] So, it's the what is the facts. The why is the meaning. And the how is the wisdom. And it's the wisdom which, for me, is most interesting. How does truth make a difference to our everyday lives?

I'm not so bothered about facts. I think meaning is important. But ultimately, the most important way of understanding truth, I'd say, is wisdom. What does it look like in practice? And if you look at the Bible, I think it's got all three aspects of truth in it.

The difficult challenge we've got is working out which Bible stories and which aspects are truth as fact, truth as meaning, or truth as wisdom. And this is where it helps, I think, with Old Testament stories in particular.

I won't tell you what I think on this. You can make up your own mind. But Noah's Ark, is that truth as fact? Is that truth as meaning? Is that truth as wisdom? I think we've got permission, looking at the whole Bible, to think of it in any or all of those ways, should we wish.

But the one we can't not think about is truth as wisdom. So what is in the Bible? What difference does that make to the practical way we live our lives? And that, to me, is what truth is. Truth is lived.

[ 19 : 16 ] Jesus says, I am the truth. We see truth personified in Jesus. So it is open for interpretation how we do it. But if we look at Jesus, that gives us the template within which we can hang our truth on, if that makes sense.

So with the Bible being translated, interpreted, and changed over the years, do you believe every word written in the Bible?

Do I. No. Not in terms of truth as fact. I think there's too much evidence that says creation didn't happen in the literal way that Genesis says, for example.

There's two creation stories for a start in Genesis in different chapters, which don't marry up. So I don't believe that Genesis is literal truth. But I do believe there's truth as meaning in Genesis. And I certainly believe there's truth as wisdom in Genesis.

So I believe the Bible is a gift to us to understand wisdom and meaning. And the facts of what happens, I think, are the ones that I struggle with sometimes.

[ 20 : 30 ] But there are certain ones I, as a Christian, believe are facts that other people wouldn't who aren't Christians. I believe Jesus was real. I believe Jesus is the Son of God. I believe Jesus died and rose again.

And I believe Jesus will return. And heaven and earth will combine. All that kind of stuff. That's fundamentals for me. I don't think you can be a Christian or follow Jesus without believing in who he says he is.

And there's other things which I think are more fluid, but not deal breakers, I suppose, in that sense. And we talked about the Bible at length, I know, a couple of years ago.

And they're online still if you want to have a listen to those because it's too much to unpack this morning. But for me, the most important thing about the Bible is to think of it as being God-breathed. And it doesn't mean God dictated it, in my understanding.

It's not like God said, write these words exactly verbatim. I think God breathed life into very human words in the same way that God breathed breath into Adam to bring life out of something which previously didn't have life.

[ 21 : 30 ] So take God's breath out of the Bible. It would just be a book. Put God's breath into the Bible. The way we read it and engage with it, it becomes a hugely important, powerful way in which we can meet and encounter God.

Yeah. Yeah. And you can read different things at different times from the same passages. It's definitely not just a book.

No, no, quite. And so the breathing implies it's alive. There's a relationship there which will ebb and flow. Like I say, different things will stick out and become more important to us at different times.

But I still think it's humans trying to understand God. And that's why I think they get God wrong sometimes in the Bible. But that's why Jesus had to come to show us the right way to think about God.

Yeah. Well, we've got a couple of human questions about people's perhaps experiences or thoughts. It's a short question, but is there an unforgivable sin?

[ 22 : 34 ] I don't know. Jesus talks about that. He talks about blaspheming the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin. And I think biblical scholars and theologians have spent a couple of thousand years trying to work out what he means by that.

And there's no definitive answers on that. So it's one of those mysterious sayings of Jesus. My limited understanding of that, therefore, is that it seems that Jesus is saying, if you reject the idea that God is present with us, if you reject the idea of God's Holy Spirit being that transforming power for us and the world, then in some senses you're outside of God's purposes for life.

And I think in saying that, Jesus puts the onus on us to either opt in or opt out of that understanding of God's presence with us.

I don't think there's any coercion on God's part, but I think the invitation is there for eternity for us to say yes to God. So if we choose to reject God, both in this life and the next, then in some senses it is unforgivable because we're not embracing what's on offer.

But I don't think there's an eternal turning away of people who, at whatever stage, would want to say yes to that presence of God being key in life.

[ 23 : 56 ] The unforgivable word is a tough one because it sounds black and white, and yet there's other things where Jesus died once for all. How can anything be unforgivable?

And that's the tension, and that's why it's so hard to work out what that particular passage means, I think. And at a more personal level, if you believe in God and something happens in the world or your life, and you may have doubts about God, it may be you're the type of person that always asks why.

How do you get back to knowing there is God? So something bad happens, and that causes you to question whether God's real or God loves you.

I think for me, this probably is rooted in who we think God is. If we approach God thinking, if I put my faith in God, then largely good things will happen to me.

I'll be blessed. God will protect me from harm and tragedy and all that. It sounds like it's kind of like a transactional kind of faith, you know, like putting in some coins in a vending machine in order to get results.

[ 25 : 10 ] We pray because we want God to do good in our lives. And I'm not sure that's the kind of God I believe in, or I don't believe in that kind of God. And that's not the way I would suggest faith works.

Instead, I think faith is about relationship with God. That bad things do seem to happen to good people. That there is a mystery as to how God interacts with the world.

But the fact that there seems to be times in our lives or situations we see that are so terrible and devastating.

Either we say that's God's fault, and that would cause me, if it really was God's fault, I'm not sure I could be a Christian. Because I can't believe that God would send genocide or whatever on people.

Instead, I would say God doesn't intervene in that sense in the world in terms of bringing, you know, results or not results or so.

[ 26 : 14 ] And I think the key word is interaction, not intervention. So God interacts with us in our lives. And when bad things happen, as they inevitably will, God interacts with us in a way which helps us to get through those with his strength.

I don't think God is this kind of vending machine intervention. If we pray enough, good things will happen. And if we don't pray, bad things will happen. I believe in an interactive, not an interventionist to God, I think.

And for me, again, I've talked about this before, I think one of the most damaging things, unfortunately, for people of faith, is this idea that everything happens for a reason.

I think that gives the impression that God's this divine chess player, moving all the pieces around, and we are just there to make up the numbers, and God's got this big plan, and we just need to get in line with it.

If everything happens for a reason, that means cot deaths happen for a reason. That means, again, genocide happens for a reason. I can't see that ever being part of God's good plan. I think that's rotten. I think it's bad luck.

[ 27 : 18 ] I think it's a result of people's mistreatment of others. I think it's part of being in a world which is not perfect. But if we take out this idea that everything happens for a reason, then it becomes more relational.

And that, to me, is more exciting, because when bad stuff happens, I think we see God more clearly in that bad stuff. Then perhaps we sometimes do in the good stuff. Yeah, that would be my haphazard take on that kind of thing.

But the idea of suffering and where's God in that, it's a huge question. One we can't unpack in two minutes. Did a couple of things on this during lockdown. I think there was one session called Everything Happens for a Reason.

You can dig out if you want. And a couple on relational prayer and transformational prayer we talked about. And how God interacts with us. And how prayer works in that. Yeah, that's not a very good answer.

But, yeah. Yeah, well, I mean, it's a difficult question. Yeah. But God, the interaction part, God puts other people back into your life to help you when these things happen.

[ 28 : 29 ] It's not obvious the route back often, but it does. And people are there for you, I'm sure. We know that you like politics.

I do. You do. And see if you can, I don't know if you'll know the answer to this question. But you can help us out. So, if Jesus was alive today, and when they had the vote for Brexit, would Jesus have voted for Brexit or to stay in the EU?

Okay. Was Jesus a Remainer? Or a, yeah, vote leave. Okay. I've got no idea. And I wouldn't say one way or another, I wouldn't want to put my words in Jesus' mouth to the slightest.



So, I've got no idea how Jesus would vote if he would have voted where we're at. I think what I do know, and this is where politics for me becomes important, is that when I look at life of Jesus, I see someone who champions community and compassion and grace and inclusion and generosity and love and care.

All those qualities. And I think our job, as we organise ourselves, since that's all politics is, as we organise ourselves in a society, which people, which leaders, which parties, which referendum decisions reflect those principles of Jesus?

[ 29 : 47 ] Which ones are closest to that kingdom ideal of Jesus's? And that's what shapes my vote. That's what I hope shapes our life as a church. That's why I think I'm happy to call out leaders where there isn't integrity and truth and compassion and so on.

I think we've had a rotten run in recent years in terms of that. But I'm not dismissing the ability of every party and every politician of every spectrum to be able to show care and compassion and generosity and kindness.

I get it's more nuanced than that than simply a left-right, in-out, remain-leave kind of thing. But I think our politics is best done when it reflects kingdom values. And it's our job to work out how we can engage with that in a way which promotes those values as best we can.

That's a good answer. Yeah, I think there is good on all sides and all parties and a bit more working together might bring a... Whoever champions supporting those who haven't got a voice, that's who would normally get my vote.

Because it goes back to that justice question. That, for me, is a mark of any society, how they look after those on the fringes and the underclass and so on. That's more important than those getting a tax break at the top or whatever.

[ 31 : 08 ] Okay, thank you. Now, we have had some questions that perhaps we can't fit into this time. Need a bit more of a quieter, reflective talk.

Talk about abortion and the change of laws in America. End-of-life care and hormone replacement therapy, gender.

Yeah. What would you like to say about how you respond to those? Yeah, I appreciate their live questions. So that's abortion, euthanasia, hormone replacement therapy and so on, particularly, I think, in teenagers.

For me, they're primarily what we might call pastoral issues, not preaching issues. And they're hugely important, but that's the reason why we don't necessarily talk about them from the front. Because I think they're far too pastorally sensitive and complicated, complex issues to have a sweeping statement from the front on those.

My hunch says, as a church, we need to engage with these matters. But a Sunday morning is probably not the forum for it. So it might be that a Sunday evening lends itself to that or house groups.

[ 32 : 20 ] But it's a lot to put on house group leaders to suddenly teach or lead on things like termination of pregnancy and so on. And that's part of my job. And Ruth's job will be to kind of collate views and present something which is helpful, I suppose, on that.

So we can do that from the autumn onwards as sort of one-off sessions, which are backed up with as much prayer and pastoral care as we can manage. But I think if what's prompted those kind of questions is that you are living with the reality of any of those issues at the moment, then I want, the most important thing I want to say on that today is that this is a safe place for you and there's no judgment.

There's no, yeah, whatever you bring, God can handle that. And I hope we as a church can handle that as well. So God's arms are wide.

And whatever we're going through, whatever we feel there might be a position of the church on or me or others, the bottom line has to be compassion and empathy and an understanding of the complexities that life brings.

And that's the starting point, not principles and you have to abide by those. It's the other way around, I think. You meet people where they're at and say, okay, where would Jesus be in this? And we work from there.

[ 33 : 32 ] So I'm not going to answer anything on that this morning. But if you want, get back to me and we can tackle those bigger issues in a more conversational setting, I suppose, on an evening where there isn't a time limit of lunch and kids groups and all that kind of stuff.

So, yeah. Well, I mean, all these questions have come from the congregation. And if any of the answers or anything has upset you, has wanted you to talk about more, Matt is quite happy for you to speak to him in private.

There's the prayer team. They're willing and able to help you. So don't go through anything on your own. We're here to share with you. Yeah.

And this is a bit weird because it's one person talking kind of thing, I suppose, in front of a group. One of the things I really enjoy about my job is the ability to thrash things out with people in terms of conversations.

So if you want to go for a walk, if you want to go for a drink, if you want to have a coffee and a Vimto or whatever with me, I'd really like that. I genuinely would. I know there's weeks get full, I know. But I never want to give the impression that I'm too busy to have those kind of proper conversations with people because that's what I enjoy, actually.

[ 34 : 45 ] Thrashing things out and working out what it means. It's that wisdom. It's the how God's love is put into practice. And if that's one-on-one and one-on-two or a house group or whatever, I need to learn from you. Hopefully there's things that you might be able to learn from me and what I've studied and so on over years.

But together we'll work it out. I believe God's spirit is able to bring direction when we meet together in Jesus' name. And yeah, that's part of the job I enjoy.

Admin, I could do without. Conversations, I enjoy. All right. That'll do. That'll do. Yes. Thank you very much. All right. Cool. Thanks, mate.

Let's thank Nigel. Not an easy one. Thank you, mate. All right. Thanks so much for those questions. As I say, shame Ruth couldn't be with us because of COVID. But I don't know if that's helpful or not.

But if you want to do that again sometime, then do another word with me. And perhaps Ruth can join us next time as well. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.