

Together on Mission session 1

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Preacher: John Risbridger

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. It's great to see you. I'll just give you a chance to take your seats because it's early to be up and about on a Saturday for some of us. But well done for coming here on time. Others will join us and take their seats as we get started.

But welcome to our weekend at home for 2024. It's so good to see you all. So good to have this time together. I'm really excited about what's in store for us today, about what God has got in store for us today. And I hope you are too. It's such a special privilege to be able to meet together like this as family, as church family, to meet together, to worship together, to get to know each other a bit better, and to hear from God's word and to learn together as well, as family together. So I'm really happy to be here. I hope you are too. Part of the aim for the weekend is kind of continuing our theme from our motto text, which we've been talking a lot about this year so far.

And hopefully you've already picked up a postcard. And hopefully you remember our motto text, which is you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. And it's about being willing for God to shape us and God to build us as his people into the people that he wants us to be and into the church that he wants us to be. And that is my prayer for today, really, that God will use this time together to build us, to shape us collectively together into the church that he wants us to be. And it's a great opportunity to do that as we spend the whole day together.

So I pray that it's an opportunity for us to get to know each other better. I encourage you to be intentional about that, about talking to people you don't know. We've got name badges to help you with that. I hope that it'll be a good chance to get to know God better and to get to know his purposes for us as individuals and as a church here in High Wycombe. And I hope it's going to be a chance to have fun. We've got a lot to celebrate today. It's wonderful to be together. I've just heard about some other news that we can celebrate today. Apparently it's Lena's birthday. I can't see Lena. Maybe she's downstairs. So do wish her a happy birthday. And congratulations to Max, who's had a baby boy last week called Luke. So congratulations to them. Just to share on a on a sadder note as well before we move on. It's sad that some people who we would have loved to have been here with us today are not with us. Many of you would have heard the news that our dear brother Don Allen passed away on Monday. And we give thanks to God for his life and we praise God for the assurance that Don is with his Lord in glory. And that's wonderful. But we do want to be in prayer, especially for Don's wife, Francoise, and for his whole family today. And also just to mention that Elizabeth Troman is in hospital in Stoke Mandeville. And she would have loved to be here. She was greatly looking forward to coming and she's not able to be with us. So we'll uphold these folks in our prayers as well as others who we would have loved to have been here as well.

So let's just take a moment to be quiet. I'll pray for some of these people and I'll pray for our time together today. A moment of quiet and then I'll pray. Father God, we want to thank you for your goodness, for your love for each one of us and your care and your concern for each one of us. And Lord, we just want to start by giving you thanks for Don's life and for the encouragement he was to so many of us, to the friend that he was to so many of us and to the love of Jesus that you showed and demonstrated through him and through what you did in his life.

[4 : 0 0] And we thank you that he is with you in glory. And we do just pray particularly for his wife and for his whole family at this time as they mourn his loss. And we want to pray for Elizabeth and others who are not well at this time, who would love to be with us today, but can't. And we just pray for your healing hand upon them and for your peace and for your comfort for them. But Lord, we want to just come before you now as we come into your presence and just lift this day up to you and pray that your will be done and that you would have your will in us and through us as we meet together, as we spend this time together. I pray that we will grow closer to each other and grow

closer to you as well. And I pray that we will have lots of fun as we do that and that you will shape us during this day into the people that you want us to be and that your name will be glorified. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Now, it's a bit of a dull day today, which is a shame, a bit rainy, a little bit foggy. We've had some nice sunny days in the last week, which has given me a bit of hope that spring is on the way and it's made me think about summer holidays when the sun comes out. And one thing for me that makes a holiday a holiday, because today is a bit like a holiday, even though the weather doesn't say that to us.

Today, I think, is a bit like a holiday for us as a church family. Something for me that makes it a holiday is having ice cream. So today, we've given you, sorry, not a real ice cream, but we've given you an imaginary ice cream.

You should find somewhere on your chair a little card with an ice cream with the flavor on that. Now, if you haven't got one, please put your hand up, because Miriam's got some spares and she's going to give you one.

So have a look at the flavor of your ice cream. So I've got one here, all different flavors. Mine says licorice. Now, what I want you to do is take a minute and talk to someone that you didn't come with and you haven't already said hello to this morning and see if they've got a flavor of ice cream that you would prefer to have.

[5 : 52] And then, if they're in agreement, do a swap. And if not, then find someone else that is willing to swap. So you end up with a better ice cream for you than what you started with. Is that okay? So you're aiming to swap and get a better ice cream.

One minute to do that. Go! Go! Go!

Thank you.

Thank you.

Swap time is over. Okay, no more swaps, please.

[8 : 04] You're going to have to stick with what you've got now. Okay, can you take your seats again, please? Okay, we're going to take our seats.

Okay, hands up. Hands up if you're happy with what you ended up with. Yeah, that's good. A lot of happy people. What have you got, Andy? Biscoff.

I got Biscoff. Dante, what have you got? You got bubble gum. Your favourite. Anyone else get their favourite? Daniel, what did you get? Mango. Fantastic.

What did you get? Vanilla. Nice. Simple. Jameson, what did you get? You got what? Walnuts.

Walnuts. I thought you said water. I was like, walnuts. That's an interesting one. Okay. Did anyone end up with one that they're not so happy with? Hands up. Tim, what did you get?

[9 : 01] Garlic. Garlic. Does anyone like garlic ice cream? It has been done. It's a real flavour. I found it on the internet. Anyone else? Hands up. I'm going to sit with Biscoff, but thanks.

Thanks, Nick. Anyone else get one they're really not happy with? Chris. I got carrots. You got carrots? Don't knock it until you tried it. However, this game can go on during the day, during coffee break.

Nick, if anyone thinks they would like carrot, go and find Chris. Do a swap with him. As you meet people during the day, ask them about their ice cream and see if they've got a better one and see if you can do another swap.

I love carrot. You got carrot. Well done, Nick. Thank you very much. You're taking it for us. That was just a bit of a fun, but also an illustration that ice creams are all different.

There's many different flavours out there. All these are out there somewhere. There's many different flavours of people as well. As God's people, as his church, he makes us all different shapes and sizes and we're different types of people.

[10 : 05] It's wonderful to be together today and to celebrate that and to celebrate the differences, the diversity, but also the fact that we're united together being God's children today. Now, I just want to share a few practical things before we go on.

Hopefully, you're all familiar with where the toilets are and stuff just on this corridor out here. You should all have a name badge. That is to help us to get to know each other today. We don't have to have that awkward conversation with the person who you have met before, but you've actually forgotten their name.

Don't worry. You can just look at their name badge. Just make use of that today. We'd encourage you, please, to use the opportunity today to get to know people that you don't know. This is part of what today is about.

Do please introduce yourself to others over coffee and during the various sessions and get to know each other. That will be a wonderful thing to do. During this session, we have a creche downstairs for preschool and under children.

It's in the Walnut suite, which is the easiest way to get to it is through the doors at the back, down, turn right, and then along the corridor. There's toys and stuff in there, and we're also streaming the session into there.

[11:08] Do feel free to go in there with young kids. For primary age kids, later on, there's a session which Jackie and Helen are leading for you. We'll tell you when to go out. Parents, you're responsible for your kids again when it's coffee time.

So please, when it's coffee time, please go and get your kids as soon as possible so that the leaders of the kids can get coffee as well, and then there'll be a session for them afterwards. For young people today, secondary age people, you have the choice.

You can go and help with the children's session. The leaders will appreciate your help, or you can stay in these teaching sessions that we're having here. The other fun thing that we've got today, thanks to Georgie and Emmanuel, is we have a photo booth, and it's down the end, and you can make use of this during the coffee breaks.

So Georgie and Emmanuel have a wedding photography business, and as part of that, they have a photo booth where you can go and get some photos with the props provided. So there are some sunglasses, and there's various hats.

I like the burger hats. I'll go for that. And you can do a bit of weightlifting, or there's a giant mobile phone, or ghetto blaster. So we'd like to encourage you to get some fun photos today.

[12:19] A, as a memento for your day, but also just to celebrate being together as all different kinds of people. So get a picture with the people that you came with, by all means, but I'd love it if you could get a picture with someone that you didn't come with, and someone else.

And that would be a wonderful day to have a memento, that's a difficult word for me to say, of the day. So please make use of that. Starting from the coffee break, it's going to be open in the coffee breaks and in the lunch breaks.

So that's there to enjoy. Now I'd like to welcome our wonderful visiting worship band, Zyndesis.

Would you like to, guys, like to come up, and I'd love to introduce you.

Yeah, let's give them a clap. Guys, thank you so much for coming. I'm just going to introduce these guys.

A lot of you will have met a lot of them before. Joel over here on drums was our ministry trainee.

How long ago now? Two years ago? Two years ago.

[13:18] And we're so thankful he's willing to still come back and serve us with his friends as well. So we've also got Seb on bass. Thank you so much for joining us, Seb. Can you introduce yourself?

And can you introduce yourself? Caleb. Great. Great to have you with us. And you know who the keyboard player is.

This is Ben. Ben is playing with nine out of ten fingers today because he's broken one of them. So he can explain the story afterwards, but he's going to carry on.

So such a blessing and a pleasure to have you with us. Thank you so much for coming. Yeah.

Thank you for leading us in worship. And I'm going to let you take it away. Caleb, thank you.

Thank you very much. Right. Well, good morning, everyone. Yeah, as I said, my name's Caleb. I'd say I'm the leader of this little group. Although Joel is the one that actually does all the organizing.

[14:16] It's like the PA, you know. So what we're going to do is we're going to sing some songs of worship together corporately. And what I just wanted to do was tell you a little bit about our first song, You've Already Won.

I think we might have done it last time we were here with you as well. I'm just going to last time I talked to you a little bit about the psalm that the song was based off. But this time when I was thinking about the song, it just drew me to actually 1 Corinthians.

And 1 Corinthians, I think it's 15 from verse 50 says this. And this is where like Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. And he's basically, a lot of the New Testament is for these letters. And Paul's

writing to all these different churches.

And he's basically like helping them get their theology straight and work out these things that they're maybe not sure about or not practicing correctly. And he's talking about in this bit about the victory that Jesus and our Lord has already won.

And I just think it's really good to look at what he says here. He says, He says, This is the important bit.

[15 : 51] That is really awesome.

Now this song and those passages tell us a few things. He has already won a battle. And that battle is the battle over sin and death. That's the resurrection, the crucifixion story, our salvation.

Jesus has already won that battle. It's already done. And then there's another thing that he's already won. He has already won and he already wins our personal battles. He works all things for good.

Comfort, safety, solace. They can all be found in Christ, even in the most brutal of trials. There is a purpose in the furnace flame. And often God allows us to be in the fire to be refined.

But he's our fourth man in the fire. That story of Daniel, Sadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I can't pronounce that right. But yeah, that story where those three Jewish men are thrown into the fire.

[17 : 09] And then they're left unharmed. And they leave the fire. And there's a fourth man seen with them. And that is Jesus. He's our fourth man in the fire. So he wins our personal battles.

He carries us through. And then finally, he's already won the battle at the end of the age. To us and our perspective, what we read about in Revelation, the day of the Lord, that's coming.

It's all still to come. It's all still to happen for us. But it's not like the day of the Lord is held in balance somewhere. It's not like it could go one way or could go another way. The ultimate victory we see in Revelation, it's already signed and sealed.

It's already sure it can't not happen. He's already won that battle. And on that day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Amen? Amen. So remember this. Remember those things when we sing this song. He's already won. You've already won. Yeah? And when we sing that together, we're actually saying as a body, as a family of believers, as brothers and sisters, we all agree and affirm that we believe that he's already won.

[18 : 17] And we genuinely do. And we're building each other up in that. So let's sing that together. So please stand with me. We're going to sing, You've Already Won. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. I know how the story ends.

[21 : 58] I know how the story ends. I know. I know.

I know. I know. I know. I know. I know.

I know. I know. I know. I know. I know.

I know how the story ends. We will be with you again.

You must save your mighty face. No more fear in life or death.

[23 : 05] Oh, I know how the story ends. We will be with you. We will be with you again.

You're my Savior. You're my Savior. You're my Savior. No more fear.

No more fear in life or death. I know how the story ends. Oh, we know.

We know how it ends. I know how it ends. I know how it ends. And we know how it ends. And we know how it ends.

And we know how it ends. And we know how it ends. I will overcome Don't know what you're doing

Don't know what you need for I'm not in a bad Don't do so many more I'm fighting a battle I'm

fighting a battle You've already won No matter what comes my way I will overcome

[24 : 52] Don't know what you're doing Don't know what you've done I'm fighting a battle You've already won You've already won the battle Amen How great the chasm that lay between us How high the mountain I could not climb

Desperation I tend to live in And spoke your name in tune Through the darkness Your love in blindness Tore through the shadows of my soul The work is finished The end is written Jesus Christ, my living hope Who could imagine So great a blessing One heart could follow Such boundless years

has known I'm face to face With heart and soul

[40 : 22] Oh This perfect spot And the ■ And the ■ Oh, before me I come, bring the snow around me, oh, by your blood, by your blood I come, open the door, turn me on, oh, my God, just hold me up, oh, the eye of your blood, your blood, your blood is now a happy heart, by your blood I come, open the door, turn me on, oh, my God, just hold me up, and this is the hour of celebration, though we're free from condemnation, oh, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, and we're free from condemnation, oh, praise the Lord, and we're free from condemnation, we're free from condemnation, oh, praise the Lord, and we're free from condemnation, oh, my God, just hold me up, we're free from condemnation, oh, my God, just hold me up, oh, my God, just hold me up, oh, my God, just hold me up, thank you so much for leading us, guys. Father God, we just thank you so much that you just invite us to come boldly into your throne room, to be in your presence, the King of kings, the creator of the universe, and yet we can come into your presence and call you Father, and we can be home in your presence, and we're just so thankful for that. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Do please sit down. Let's give a round of applause to some people. Thank you so much for leading us. That was wonderful. Now, at this point, I'm very excited to welcome our guest speakers for this weekend.

John and Alison, would you like to come up just so we can introduce you? Do come up if you stand on that side. You stand in the middle, Alison, because you haven't got a microphone.

So I'm so delighted to be able to introduce John and Alison to you. They're going to be with us for the whole weekend, which is such a blessing for us. I'll let them introduce themselves in a moment, but my connection with John and Alison, I actually first met John about 25, 26 years ago when I was at university at Southampton.

Anyone else from university at Southampton? There's a few of us. Best university in the world. And I was involved in the Christian Union there, and I had the job of coordinating the cell groups, and I didn't have a clue what I was doing, and I was supposed to do a weekend to train up the cell group leaders.

[44 : 50] I didn't have any idea how to lead a small group, a cell group. And someone suggested that I ask John, who was working for UCCF at the time, which supports Christians in universities, to come and help lead that weekend.

And he came, and he was awesome, and it was a big support. And then I bumped into John and Alison again very recently on the course I'm doing. Some of you know I'm doing a leadership and theology training course through Catalyst, and John and Alison are now leading that course, and it's been a wonderful blessing to me.

The input they've given on the course has really helped me so much just in my walk with God to grow in that, but also to be equipped for the stuff I'm doing here, and that's been awesome.

So thank you so much for agreeing to come. Can you just tell us a little bit about yourselves before we pray for you, and then at that point we'll send the children out as well. Thank you. Yeah.

So we're based down near Southampton still. We live just on the edge of the New Forest, which is all very beautiful. And we worship in a church.

[45 : 52] We were in leadership in the church for 18 years in the center of Southampton, and about a year and a half ago, two years ago, we felt God was very clearly saying it's time to move on.

We didn't know what to, so it was a huge step of faith. And we worship in a different church now that's a real blessing to us, and John can say what he's doing. I spend three or four days a week teaching English to people from lots of different nations who live from very difficult circumstances as refugees to the city.

So that's a real privilege and blessing for me, and something that's been very exciting over the years. We've got two daughters who are, well, one is nearly 30, which makes us feel really old, and the other is 26.

And they're a real joy to us as well. Oh, one of them got engaged three weeks ago. Wow.

Congratulations. News in the family. Wonderful. Thank you. And yet the other connection with here is Tim Feeney and Sam and Lucy Lenton, both people that we, all people, rather, that we knew very well in the Bud Bar days.

And Tim actually had the misfortune of living with us for a year. So it's great to just renew that friendship. During lockdown. During lockdown, yeah. Yeah, we didn't let him escape. So, yes, after we were leading a Bud Bar church in the middle of Southampton for 18 years, as Alison said, then I

took a year out to study.

[47 : 22] I did a very similar course to what Andrew did at All Nations College in sort of church and mission, that kind of thing. And then God led us into working with Catalyst.

The church we go to, King's Community Church, is part of the Catalyst family of churches. And the leadership program that Andrew attends is serving those churches, and we're now leading that together, which is wonderful.

And then from Easter, I'll also be on the staff of the church part-time doing mission things locally. So that's absolutely brilliant. Thank you. We're really looking forward to hearing you.

John's going to be teaching this morning. Alison's doing a workshop later on that some of us are going to be attending. So I'm going to pray for John and Alison. I'm also going to pray for Jackie and Helen and others who are going to be leading our children's session this morning.

Just to note, we are a bit behind schedule, but that's fine. The schedule is a plan to work from rather than to work to. So the next session we're going to run until 11.25. Jackie, if that's all right with you, you'll have the children until 11.25.

[48 : 22] We'll break for coffee at that point. So let's pray for John and Alison and for our kids before they go out as well. Father God, we thank you so much for John and Alison and for the ministry that you've called them to in teaching and leading others and working with international students as well, as we've heard.

And I just want to pray for John now as he shares with us. I pray that you will speak through him and speak to our hearts from your word, that we would be changed and transformed by your word. I just want to pray for Jackie and her team and for the children, young people who are going out now, that they'll have a wonderful session, enjoying spending time together and growing closer to you and closer to each other. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So thanks, Alison. I'll let you go. So children, if you're a primary age child or if you're a young person who wants to help them, if you can go with Jackie now and then we'll see you again in about 40 minutes time.

So we'll let you go. Carry on. Thank you. Great.

[49 : 37] Great. Well, again, thank you very much for your lovely welcome to us and the hospitality we've already enjoyed with Sam and Lucy last night and with Andrew and Miriam.

And it's great to be here, great to reconnect with old friends and I trust over the course of the weekend to make some new friends as well. We're going to be looking over today and tomorrow at what we call the Book of Titus, originally a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his colleague Titus. And you're going to hear quite a lot of words from me, I suppose, in the next 24 hours or so. So I want to give priority to the only words you're going to hear from me that are completely dependable, which are the words of Scripture itself.

So I'm going to read Titus chapter one and we'll take a chapter for each session. I'll go through it fairly quickly, but let's not see the reading of God's word as just a preamble to the talk.

It's a big deal to hear the word of God read to us. So let me read Titus chapter one. I'm reading from the NIV 2011 version. I hope that's okay.

[50 : 47] There may be slight differences with what you have, depending what's in front of you. So Titus chapter one. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

In the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time and which now at his appointed season, he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God, our Savior.

To Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God, the Father and Christ Jesus, our Savior. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who's self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it's been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

[52 : 12] For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

One of Crete's own prophets has said it. Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. There you go. This saying is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.

They're detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good. That's some pretty strong words in Titus, aren't there? I hope we'll be able to make a bit of sense of them as we go through.

So a number of years ago, Alison and I had the pleasure of spending a couple of weeks on a lovely island in the Caribbean. It was a beautiful time.

[53 : 29] We were doing teaching for a week, and then we had a week of holiday. And in the second week, we were staying in the lovely home of a delightful family who entertained us for the week. And it was a beautiful home.

It was new, and to be honest, it was pretty swanky. It was quite an impressive kind of place. But the thing that struck me about it was on a marina with a kind of back garden entrance onto the sea, that kind of place.

But the whole thing couldn't have been more than two metres above sea level, and the sea was right there, just in the back garden. And so I can't quite remember how I dared to get the conversation to this point.

But at one point, I asked the guy who lived there if anyone on the island talked much about global warming and rising sea levels.

Because I was thinking, you know, one metre and your garden's history. Two metres, the house is in the ocean. This isn't a very happy situation.

[54 : 29] My host looked a bit surprised that I'd asked the question. And he said, no, I've not heard anyone talk about that around here. So I tactfully moved on and thought this wasn't quite the thing to be talking about.

But it did leave me with this rather uneasy sense that this tropical paradise that we were living in, which seemed so idyllic, was actually rather caught in unreality and was effectively living a lie.

No one's talking about that stuff here. Well, there was another island, this time in the Mediterranean, which was famed for living a lie. And it was the island of Crete to which Paul sent this letter, which we call the Book of Titus.

And lying was something that the island of Crete was famous for in the ancient world. So much so that as we read in chapter 1, verse 12, one of their own people, their own poets said, the Cretans are always liars.

Strong language. And Paul agrees with them. He says this saying is true. What's this deal there? What's the connection between Crete, Cretans, and liars?

[55 : 40] Lying. It actually goes quite deep. You see, the Cretans worshipped the Greek gods headed up by Zeus, the god of the sky, so they thought.

But the Cretans had their own kind of version of the Zeus myths. They believed, and it rather suited their sense of sort of island pride, I suppose, that Zeus was a man-turned god who had been born in Crete and was buried in Crete.

I don't quite get my head around how they came to that conclusion, but that's what they thought.

And they thought that he was a man who had been made a god by human beings after he had proved himself rather useful to them, getting some good harvests and that sort of thing going.

But then here's the key thing. They believed and they celebrated Zeus as a crafty deceiver. One of their myths told how he had disguised himself as the husband of one of the most beautiful women in the island in order to seduce her for himself.

And he was celebrated for the power of his deceptions. Stand back. What's going on here? This is a society living in a lie about a lying god who was himself a lie and who didn't hesitate to lie to get what he wanted from other people.

Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
[66 : 57] Thank you.
Thank you.