

'THE GLORY OF GOD IS  
A HUMAN BEING FULLY ALIVE'  
ST IRENAEUS

S2-W1

FULLY ALIVE (SEASON TWO)  
VOCATION – BECOMING A PEOPLE OF HOPE.



WEEK ONE: BECOMING FULLY ALIVE

**Sharing News** - 10 minutes

**Prayer and Quietness**

**Setting the Scene** - 15 minutes

*Spend a short time talking about these passages, and reflect together on what they are saying about our society and God's call.*

**John Taylor (1914-2001)**

Life, of which this dynamic, living God is the source, is relationship. The deadness, which is our sin against life, comes from our refusal of exchange, our shutting off of self so as neither to give nor receive. Being brought to life is the renewal of relationship with this living God and, in him, with all creatures.

It follows, then, that the life of the fully alive cannot be sustained in isolation or privacy, but must express itself in community. This does not mean clubs and cliques or general *bonhomie*. It means being open, whenever the opportunity is afforded, for those exchanges whereby the aliveness and freedom of the one flows to the other, or the pain and darkness of the other is shared and taken upon the one.<sup>1</sup>

**Article in The Independent:**

**'We don't need this culture of overwork' by Johann Hari, 8th January 2010.**

Work is the activity that we spend most of our waking lives engaged in - yet it is too often trapped in an outdated routine. Today, very few of us work in factories, yet we have clung to the habits of the factory with almost religious devotion. Clock in, sit at your terminal, be seen to work, clock out. Is this the best way to make us as productive and creative and happy as we can be? Should we clamber into a steel box every morning to sit in a concrete box all day?

...In a wired lap-topped world, far more people could work more effectively from home, in hours of their own choosing, if only their bosses would have confidence in them. They would be better workers, better parents and better people - and we would take a huge number of cars off the road.

But the problem runs deeper than this. Britain now has the longest work hours in the developed world after the US - and in a recession, those of us with jobs scamper ever faster in our hamster-wheels. Yes, we now make the Japanese look chilled. This is not how 2010 was meant to turn out. If you look at the economists and thinkers of, say, the 1930s, they assumed that once we had achieved abundance - once humans had all the food and clothes and heat and toys we could use - we would relax and work less. They thought that by now work would barely cover three days as we headed en masse for the beach and the concert-hall.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, J, V, A Matter of Life and Death (London: 1986), pp.20-7 in Rowell, G, Stevenson, K and Williams, R, Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness (Oxford University Press: 2003), pp.720-1

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Instead, the treadmill is whirling ever-faster. This isn't our choice: virtually every study of this issue finds that huge majorities of people say they want to work less and spend more time with their friends, their families and their thoughts. We know it's bad for us. Professor Cary Cooper, who has studied the effects of overwork on the human body, says: "If you work consistently long hours, more than 45 a week, every week, it will damage your health, physically and psychologically." You become 37 per cent more likely to suffer a stroke or heart-attack if you work 60 hours a week – yet one in six of all Brits are doing just that.<sup>2</sup>

**Extract from The Rule of Benedict, by Joan Chittister.**

The rule of Benedict exacts something so much harder for our century than rigor. Benedictine spirituality demands balance. Immediately after Benedict talks about the human need to work, to fill our lives with something useful and creative and worthy of our concentration, he talks about lectio, about holy reading and study...It was a gentle, full, enriching, regular, calm and balanced life. It was a prescription for life that ironically has become very hard to achieve...But it may be more necessary that ever if the modern soul is to regain any of the real rhythm of life and so its sanity as well.<sup>3</sup>

**Listening to the Word** - 45 minutes

Both passages are read aloud and this is followed by a short time of reflection.

- a) John 10: 7-11
- b) Romans 8: 11

**Questions**

1. What is the 'life' that Jesus speaks of?
2. Can you think of any examples of people you have known who have been 'fully alive'?
3. What is abundant life for you, your community and for your church?
4. How do you recognise the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, in your own life and community?

**What shall we do?** - 10 minutes

*Spend a short time together thinking about what these reflections mean for us and what we should do about them.*

**Closing Prayers**

<sup>2</sup> Hari, J, (2010), 'We don't need this culture of overwork', Available: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-we-dont-need-this-culture-of-overwork-1861188.html>. [Accessed 20th May 2010]

<sup>3</sup> Chittister, J. D, The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages (Crossroad Spiritual Legacy: 1992)

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WEEK TWO: COMMUNITY – GROWING TOGETHER IN ‘ONE-ANOTHERNESS’

**Sharing News** - 10 minutes

**Prayer and Quietness**

**Setting the Scene** - 15 minutes

*Spend a short time talking about these passages, and reflect together on what they are saying about our society and God’s call.*

**Transcript of a short interview with Nelson Mandela, where he explains the African concept of ‘Ubuntu.’**

In the old days when we were young, a traveller through a country would stop at a village, and he didn’t have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops the people give him food; entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but it has various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not address themselves. The question therefore is, are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you, and enable it to improve? These are the important things in life. And if one can do that, you have done something very important which will be appreciated.<sup>4</sup>

**‘Facebook criticised by Archbishop’**

**Social networking websites, texting and e-mails are undermining community life, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales has warned.**

Archbishop Vincent Nichols said MySpace and Facebook led young people to seek “transient” friendships, with quantity becoming more important than quality... Archbishop Nichols said society was losing some of its ability to build communities through inter-personal communication, as the result of excessive use of texts and e-mails rather than face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations.

He said skills such as reading a person’s mood and body language were in decline, and that exclusive use of electronic information had a “dehumanising” effect on community life...<sup>5</sup>

**‘Walls ruin community spirit, says archbishop’**

The Archbishop of York has compared houses and estates surrounded by walls and large gates to “prisons” that undermine the spirit of neighbourliness. Dr John Sentamu... said that people who built high fences to protect their properties had cut themselves off from their communities...

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4 Video of this interview can be seen at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3292332486849787667#>.

[Video accessed 20 May 2010]

5 BBC News (2009) ‘Facebook criticised by Archbishop’, Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8180115.stm>

[Article accessed 8th September 2009]

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The archbishop said he had grown up as part of a supportive, extended family and when he worked in London he had encouraged Church members to become surrogate uncles and aunts to children who lacked relatives. "That dramatically changed the way in which people related to one another," he said.

"So it is possible that we should be neighbourly to one another and to provide the kind of support which, had you been in the kind of culture that I come from, you would have had.

"We are each other's keeper and we should be able to care. If you know people who are disabled, people who are not well, people who live alone, why not knock on their door and, when the weather is getting very cold, say, 'Hello, how are you? How are you keeping? Can we do some shopping for you? Can we help you?'

"I want to create a culture in which I am not alone. But at the moment in this country there is a great loneliness." <sup>6</sup>

**Part of Meditation XVII from Devotions upon Emergent Occasions by John Donne (1624)**

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. <sup>7</sup>

**Questions**

1. If the African concept of 'ubuntu' is the opposite of the word 'individualism' how might we describe this concept in our own language and culture?
2. "I want to create a culture in which I am not alone. But at the moment in this country there is a great loneliness." Discuss how your local church can respond to a lack of community and 'loneliness' in British society today?

**Listening to the Word - 45 minutes**

Both passages are read aloud and this is followed by a short time of reflection.

- a) John 15: 12-17                      b) Acts 2: 43-47

**Questions**

1. What is the difference between the church as you know it and the early church in Acts?
2. How do we live the new commandment to 'love one another' in our local church?
3. What do you hold to be 'in common' among Christians in your own area?
4. What wonders and signs of God's activity do we see in our time and community?

**What shall we do? - 10 minutes**

*Spend a short time together thinking about what these reflections mean for us and what we should do about them.*

**Closing Prayers**

6 Petre, J & Salter, M, (2005), 'Walls ruin community spirit, says archbishop', Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1506098/Walls-ruin-community-spirit-says-archbishop.html>. [Article accessed 20th September 2009]  
7 <http://www.online-literature.com/donne/409/>. [Accessed 11th May 2010]

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WEEK THREE: KNOWING OUR GIFTS

**Sharing News** - 10 minutes

**Prayer and Quietness**

**Setting the Scene** - 15 minutes

*Spend a short time talking about these passages, and reflect together on what they are saying about our society and God’s call.*

**Susan Boyle takes a bow**

**Piers Morgan recalls the incredible debut of the biggest talent show star in history. As told to Laura Potter.**



**The Observer, Sunday 27 December 2009**

Whatever yarn I now try to spin about my reaction to Susan Boyle, the reality is recorded in video posterity. It had been a very long day in Glasgow. There’d been very little talent and this seemed to be the bad icing on the terrible cake.

There was no way on earth this 47-year-old lady in a rather frumpy dress from a tiny village in Scotland was going to do anything but be a bit of a laughing stock. It taught me – not that I should need to be taught this – never to judge a book by its cover, because Britain is full of these rather eccentric people who appear out of nowhere and have extraordinary talent.<sup>8</sup>

**Extract from ‘Primary Charge to Churchwardens’, given by The Right Revd Dr David Stancliffe, Bishop of Salisbury on Thursday 11th June 2009.**

‘Get a life’ means finding out about your gifts, and enjoying using them - for God and for others as much as for yourself. That’s the way to personal happiness and fulfilment, as well as to life with God. You may be saying, but I’m not 18; and I no longer stand on the threshold, with life-choices before. What about me? My friends, I say exactly the same to you: enjoy the gifts God has given you; use them for God and for others, and your life will blossom, and spill over into the well-being of those around you. ‘I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life.’<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Potter, L, (2009), ‘Susan Boyle takes a bow’, Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/27/susan-boyle-debut-britains-got-talent>. [Accessed 12th May 2010]

<sup>9</sup> Stancliffe, D, (2009), ‘Sherborne Abbey – Sermons from Sherborne’, Available: <http://www.sherborneabbey.com/sermons/viewsermon.php?ID=61>. [Accessed 12th May 2010]

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**Extract from a sermon preached by The Reverend Canon Rosalind Brown  
in Durham Cathedral on St. Luke’s day 2009.**

So the picture we have of Luke is of a faithful man who was prepared to sacrifice the opportunity and gift of family life for travel to support one of the early missionaries of the church, who used his medical skills to keep that missionary on the road and his education to record some of the stories that would otherwise have been lost to the church and the world...

What do you think of as your vocation, your calling? Perhaps Luke reminds us that commitment to Christ is about using our gifts well and in combination with each other and the gifts of others: so, writing if we write, painting if we paint, healing people if we have medical training, being a companion to other people and helping them fulfil their vocation, facing danger if necessary, sacrificing the opportunity of marriage for the freedom to respond to a peripatetic lifestyle and sudden changes in plan, or of city life for the road. That was Luke’s story, what is your equivalent set of gifts and responsibilities? Our Christian vocation is not just about doing something religious, it is about finding ways to use our particular circumstances, gifts and skills in God’s service wherever we are. It is about putting up with difficult people, hanging in when it would be easier to drop out, keeping going not ‘when I’m sixty four’ but when I’m eighty four, being ready to face changes in the direction of life when circumstances demand it. In Luke’s case it is about literally going the extra mile for God.<sup>10</sup>

**Questions**

1. Does our TV and media culture encourage us to judge people by their appearance rather than by their ability?
2. In light of David Standcliffe’s and Rosalind Brown’s words how do you think your local church can better help people (especially the young) discover and use their own unique, God-given gifts?

**Listening to the Word - 45 minutes**

Both passages are read aloud and this is followed by a short time of reflection.

- a) Luke 10: 1-9                      b) Corinthians 1: 4-31

**Questions**

1. What are the things that you enjoy doing in the life and work of the Church?
2. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” What does this tell us about how the church functions as the “body of Christ”?
3. 1 Corinthians 12:4-31 is clear that through our common baptism, we all have a ministry within the one body of Christ. What do you believe is your ministry within the body?
4. Are you enjoying the gifts that God has given you?

**What shall we do? - 10 minutes**

*Spend a short time together thinking about what these reflections mean for us and what we should do about them.*

**Closing Prayers**

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10 Brown, R, (2009), ‘Durham Cathedral – Sermon Archive’, Available: <http://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/schedule/sermons/398> [Accessed 1st November 2009]