

# Sanctuary First

April 2013

## Theme Summary

“Always”

### ***Scripture focus:***

Scripture Focus: Matt 28:20 “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age”.

### ***Background:***

Background: Jesus last words with his disciples as recorded by Matthew in the heady days when he would be with them for short unexpected periods after his resurrection included the promise that he would always be there. It’s something many cling to in times of uncertainty and thus qualifies as a ‘heart verse’. For Matthew, the promise has such significance that he records at the very beginning of his gospel that the baby Jesus would have two names - Jesus =God saves, and Immanuel= God is with us. But how do we really actually know this to be true ourselves? The intention of the service is to explore this partly by the story of others for example Jonah and partly by deepening our sense of God.

### Focus

- Passing on the stories of Jonah and Jesus
- Engaging with a bible story - Jonah - to deepen our own faith in God’s promises now
- Worship contemporary enough to echo with us in the week/weeks to come

**The outline presented here provides a skeleton to work with as appropriate in your own setting. Songs and possibly prayers may need to be added.**

<b>PRESENTER</b>	Welcome and introduction
<b>VIDEO</b>	"Always"
<b>PRESENTER</b>	<p>These famous last words of Jesus give us courage to go wherever he sends us. That final promise was already embedded in one of the names given to him at his birth when Joseph was told that his son would be called "Emmanuel" which means "God is with us".</p> <p>Names are important. In the Bible, names give us a clue to the person - something about their character or their destiny</p>
<b>WHAT'S IN A NAME?</b>	<p>What do people associate with these names e.g. Tiger Wood, Bear Grylls, Pope Francis, Lady Gaga, Chief Running Water, The Artist formerly known as Prince, Boogie in the morning, Doubting Thomas</p> <p>Some people adopt names to conceal their true identity e.g. Pen names as authors or bloggers OR stage names as actors Ask for some examples.</p> <p>On twitter, people use a tag to identify them.</p> <p>In Pairs: What tag could you have that would describe one of your own life-long characteristics?</p>
<b>VIDEO</b>	<b>The Story of the Grumpiest Prophet</b> (story of Jonah)
<b>CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY</b>	<p>Need Bibles/copies of the short book of Jonah</p> <p><i>Leaders background to be used to introduce and keep things moving.</i></p> <p><b>He was a right Jonah...</b>but the story of someone God was always with. God gave Jonah a most unlikely job. He was a man from a very small country being sent to Nineveh (now the location of Baghdad)– the capital of the regional power, Assyria, just setting out to be a major and very cruel occupying force in the region. Was this a proper job for a man of God? A priority job? Could the message really have come from God? Was it likely God was concerned about such a kind of people? Perhaps Jonah was, reasonably, scared and sceptical.</p> <p>The immediate result of Jonah's mission, after he failed to 'lose' God was dramatic success. His story is thought to have been written down to encourage the people of Israel after their exile because he was a national hero. Although to Jonah himself a great disappointment. Maybe he was proved right – the conversion didn't last historically. Should the outcome be Jonah's concern anyway? For us, it's in one way reassuring that you can't 'lose' God. Also that moods and grumpiness won't distract God, who may use events to redirect, save from impulsive reactions and even provide shelter to sulk under.</p>

	<p><b>Contextual Questions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pick out the three qualities of Jonah that strike you as significant</li> <li>2. Is there anything in the story that surprised you?</li> <li>3. What aspects of the story do you think are relevant today?</li> </ol>
<b>WHEN THE HEART WAITS</b>	<p>Sometimes, it's not so much that an odd message seems to be coming through from God, so much as no sense of his presence at all.</p> <p>[Choose <b>one of the two</b> excerpts from 'When the Heart Waits' by Sue Monk Kidd as examples of a period in life when God feels distant or even absent.]</p> <p><i>(Use visual image of Chrysalis)</i></p>
<b>PRAYER</b>	<p>Around the themes:</p> <p>The sun is always there, even when it's not.</p> <p>When you are sure you're not on your own, you take courage to do things you wouldn't otherwise.</p> <p><i>(use visual image of hands holding)</i></p>
<b>VIDEO</b>	<p>Visuals of various stages of life accompanied by the music and words of The Circle of Life.</p>
<b>NAMES</b>	<p>Matt 1:21,23 Two names were given to Jesus at birth:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jesus =God saves</li> <li>2. Immanuel=God with us</li> </ol> <p>And Matthew's gospel finishes with this promise from Jesus <i>Matt 28:18-20</i>  Jesus drew near and said to them "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always to the end of the age."</p> <p>This promise that Jesus would always be there is not a vaguely formed concept of God, or only if he wasn't busy somewhere else, it is a fundamental characteristic of him – in fact, his name.</p> <p><b>But you have to do the stepping out bit first.</b></p>
<b>VIDEO</b>	<p>Show "Always" video again</p>

## WHEN THE HEART WAITS (EXCERPT 1)

### Spiritual Equinox<sup>1</sup>

*The writer has been experiencing a disturbing season of God's absence in her life. It seems that God is distant and none of the usual landmarks of her spiritual life make any sense. She has been sustained in part by watching a caterpillar's cocoon in the garden, with its mysterious hidden life waiting to re-emerge in a different form. During this season, she finds another hint of the possibility of God....*

As I climbed into bed on the eve of the spring equinox, a soft rain was falling. The storm that had seized the backyard earlier in the day had gone, leaving its imprint on torn limbs and battered shrubs - an equinoctial gale, the weatherman had called it. He commented that at the spring equinox, when the sun moves over the equator, the pattern of warm and cold air masses sometimes changes, stirring up the atmosphere. Storms happen.

That seems to be the way of the universe, the inner and outer. Crossing spiritual meridians stirs the atmosphere within. People have equinoctial storms too. We need to accept them as part of the crossing into a new season.

I looked at the clock. Nearly 11.00pm. The equinox was due to arrive at 4.39am. At that precise moment the sun would cross the equator and spring would arrive. Afterwards, the nights would be shorter and the days would be longer.

The prospect encouraged me. I thought of the darkness that comes upon us in crisis, the black orbits of pain through which we move. I asked God if there would be a spiritual equinox inside me, a crossing over after which a new season would come and the darkness would gradually begin to wane.

I kissed my husband goodnight and drifted to sleep, listening to the night murmur outside my bedroom window. Later I woke to a room full of shadows. The numbers on the clock read 4.38am.

It took a few seconds for the mystery to register. I had wakened for the spring equinox. I slipped from beneath the blanket and tiptoed to the back door. I stared into the night, my heart pounding. Above me, far beyond the bounds of my comprehension, God was threading the night with spring.

I stood still and let the darkness move inside me too.

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<sup>1</sup> Kidd, Sue Monk, *When the Heart Waits - Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions*, Harper One, 2006, p 100

## WHEN THE HEART WAITS (EXCERPT 2)

### Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions<sup>2</sup>

Overhead a thickening of clouds wreathed everything in grayness. It was February, when the earth of South Carolina seems mired in the dregs of winter. I had been walking for miles; I don't know how many. I could feel neither my toes inside my shoes, nor the wind on my face. I could feel nothing at all but an intense aching in my soul. For some months I had been lost in a baffling crisis of spirit. Back in the autumn I had awakened to a growing darkness and cacophony, as if something in my depths were crying out. A whole chorus of voices. Orphaned voices. They seemed to speak for all the un-lived parts of me, and they came with a force and dazzle that I couldn't contain. I know now that they were the clamor of a new self struggling to be born. I was standing on the shifting ground of midlife, having come upon that time in life when one is summoned to an inner transformation, to a crossing over from one identity to another. When change-winds swirl through our lives, especially at midlife, they often call us to undertake a new passage of the spiritual journey: that of confronting the lost self- our true self. They call us to come home to ourselves, to become who we really are. That winter of my discontent, I had no real idea of any of this... I kept walking through the fogged afternoon light as if the mere ritual of putting one foot in front of the other would lead me out of my pain. I buried my hands in the pockets of my coat and watched the wind blow a paper cup along the gutter. ..The familiar circles of my life left me with a suffocating feeling. My marriage suddenly seemed stale, unfulfilling; my religious structures, stifling. Things that used to matter no longer did; things that had never mattered were paramount. My life had curled up in the mark of a question.... I burrowed into the wind, my head down. I happened to look up again as I passed beneath the branches of a dogwood tree, and my eyes fell upon a curious appendage suspended from a twig just over my head. I kept walking. No, stop...look closer. Not knowing what else to do but obey the inner impulse, I backed up and looked again. I took one step toward it, then two, until I was so close that the fog of my breath encircled it. I had come upon a cocoon.

I was caught suddenly by a sweep of reverence, by a sensation that made me want to sink to my knees. For somehow I knew that I had stumbled upon an epiphany, a strange gracing of my darkness. I took my forefinger and touched the bottom tip of the tiny brown chrysalis and felt something like light move in me. In that moment God seemed to speak to me about transformation. About the descent and emergence of the soul. ..I broke the twig from the limb and carried the chrysalis home. For this was my cocoon. My darkness. My soul incubating within. Back home I carefully taped the twig with the cocoon to the branch of a crab-apple tree in my backyard. Then I went inside. I stood at the window watching the cocoon, which hung in the winter air like an upside-down question mark. That was the moment... I understood. Really understood. Crisis, change, all the myriad upheavals that blister the spirit and leave us groping- they aren't voices simply of pain but also of creativity. And if we would only listen, we might hear such times beckoning us to a season of waiting, to the place of fertile emptiness.

<sup>2</sup> Kidd, Sue Monk, *When the Heart Waits - Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions*, Harper One, 2006