

15th August 2021 – Morning Service
Equipping church, you and me, in its mission to help people encounter Jesus
Rev Josephine Soon

Introduction

At the end of Spring, our circuit hosted 3 Alpha Talks; two online and one group meeting in person. It has proved, once again that during the lockdown, even as times have changed, the Alpha course has continued as an effective tool to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ and most importantly, efficient in equipping the followers of Jesus in mission to help people encounter Jesus. Today, we are going to give God praise and thanks, to share some stories of lives transformed through our experience of Alpha Talks and to encourage you and your whole church to get involved in our future Alpha Talks throughout our circuit.

What are The Alpha Talks?

Alpha began at a church called Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) in London in 1977, it was taken over by Rev Nicky Gumbel in 1990 and repositioned as a course for those outside the church. Now all over the world millions of people have tried Alpha and it has been translated into 112 different languages. The Alpha Talks have been repackaged for today's audience in the Alpha Film Series to reach a younger generation with the Gospel. In 2019, over 5,600 Catholic parishes and Christian organisations around the world ran Alpha with an estimated 310,000 participants. Alpha is a parish tool for evangelisation where everyone is welcome. The same Alpha content is run all over the world, by Christians of all traditions, sharing the good news of Jesus. This unites all the churches into One and participation in the same Mission with God.

Call to Worship

Let's us pause to be still. Prepare ourselves as we re-centre our scattered senses upon the presence of God..... *[Silence]* Father God, we come to rest in Your presence now. As we rest in you, we receive Your grace, peace and love. **Amen.**

Psalm 111

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of honour and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. Amen.

Primrose's Testimony

It was during lockdown that Josephine invited us to join the Tuesday Alpha Talks on Zoom. We have worshiped in a United Reformed Church in Somerset for many years. We are Christians, of course, but we do not know how to express our belief and faith in words to other people. Although it is good that we always try to live out our faith I think it is very important that we could also learn how to express our faith in words to others. I joined in one of Josephine's devotion groups a long time ago. I really enjoyed it and was inspired by that experience. We had heard about Alpha Talks and trust that it will help us to learn more about our faith. As we look back now, through the Alpha Talks, we have grown more confident and now find words to talk about our Christian faith and Jesus with others in our group. It is like learning a different language; very challenging at times but rewarding. I have found myself growing confident to talk about my faith and pray for others. I would like to continue talking about Jesus and my faith with a small group of people by joining the online Thursday Discussion Church recommended by Josephine. Alpha is not only for non-believers. If you think you already know Jesus, I encourage you to try Alpha Talks too. You will be surprised how little you actually understand yourself and how much more you could do to know Jesus!

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks for the tool of Alpha, we praise you for equipping your people whom you have called for your glory. You gave your Son for the life of the whole world. Give us the desire to want to grow our understanding of the risen Christ, and let your Holy Spirit guide us that we may love and serve you on earth, and live with you for ever in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

StF 82 – O Lord my God

- 1) O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed!
 - 2) When through the woods and forest glades
I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain
grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze
 - 3) And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die -- I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:
 - 4) When Christ shall come with shout of
acclamation
And take me home - what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how
great Thou art!
- Ch) Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

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Reading - Matthew 28:16-20 The Commissioning of the Disciples

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

StF 666 – Master, Speak! Thy servant heareth

- 1) Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for thy gracious word,
Longing for thy voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
What hast thou to say to me?
- 2) Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the rock.
- 3) Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! For O thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak, and make me blest indeed.
- 4) Master, speak: and make me ready,
When thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
Master, speak! O speak to me!

Frances Ridley Havergal CCL No. 515642

Sermon: Equipping church, you and me, in mission to help people encounter Jesus

Whether your church has been meeting for a few hundred years or just a few days, there is a story of why and how that particular local family of Christian people came into existence. Your church probably began with just a few people and a vision to grow and connect with the local community.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples...”

Christian people reaching out in mission to our friends and the local community is our way of life, a tradition of all Christian society throughout the history of church. Our God who draws people to His Son who then sends them out to make more disciples (Matthew 28: 16-20). Christians, we have been drawn by God and God send us to the Son. The Son sends us out and commissions us to make more disciples of Jesus. There is no surprise that Alpha is a great tool for church to help people encounter Jesus. It is because The Alpha Talks are simple, flexible and effective tools for any local church to connect the message of Jesus to the community. If you are looking for an easy and effective way to do mission, Alpha is a great place to start.

At the end of May I led a small team to plant a fresh expression of church in Wesley Methodist Church.

Gary's Story

My father recommended me to try Alpha. I found out that the nearest Alpha to me is this Friday Alpha at Wesley Methodist Church. I came to join the Alpha Talks and wanted to explore Christian faith. I had never prayed in my life until 2 weeks ago, I started to pray with Arthur, Brenda and Josephine in one of the sessions. My life changed dramatically in that week. From a very dark place for over 2 years; lost my job...health and almost lost my life. After I learned about what/ how to pray, I started to pray regularly that week. So many things also happened that week really blowing my mind! I have got a job interview and I am going to start a very good job in 2 weeks! My wife is getting job interview too! I really want to share my testimony!

That afternoon, Gary brought his friend, Richard, to join us. From a small group of Alpha, we are gradually forming a discussion church here in Wesley. The Holy Spirit is working through Alpha Talks! Alpha is a series of interactive sessions designed to help people, both believers and not-yet believers, to explore the basics of the Christian faith. Besides making new disciples, churches are also desperately looking for effective ways to train new leaders. By running Alpha several times a year, perhaps once a quarter, your church can create a really simple pipeline for training leaders.

Equipping church, you and me, in mission to help people encounter Jesus.....First someone comes as a guest and comes to faith, then they come back and help in another Alpha group where they get to observe good leadership and gain some understanding of what it is like leading a group. Then, once you feel they are ready, they can host a group. Eventually they may well find that they have an opportunity to run Alpha for a particular group they are involved in. There's a lady who was in our Thursday Alpha group, she helped on Alpha and on the last two sessions she led the Alpha Talks. She attended a few sessions of training with me. Now, she is already talking about how she could find a way to run Alpha to help people who are facing lots of difficult life questions. She wants to find a way to share her faith with them. Alpha provides a natural pipeline for creating new leaders in the church.

Equipping church, you and me, in mission to help people encounter Jesus....Lord Jesus is commissioning us, '...Go therefore and make disciples...' We know our church needs to grow. We know we do not have much energy and people to take the responsibility for all the church activities. Therefore, we need pruning; cut down our activities in our church. We need to decide on the activities that can help us fulfil Jesus' Great Commission for us to make disciples of all nations.

A story

In September 2016, Revd Olly Ryder led a team to plant St Matthias Church Plymouth, a city centre resource church: *Our dream is to be a church for the whole city and region for people from any background and walk of life. Alpha very much helps us begin to form this sort of community. We'd just focus on three things: Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Alpha. We wanted everyone we came into contact with to either help on Alpha or come on Alpha. Other than Sunday services Alpha was the main thing that kickstarted the church. If people wanted to start a home group we said, "Come on Alpha." If they wanted to help with homeless work we said, "Come on Alpha." If they wanted to do anything, we said, "Come on Alpha!". At our first Alpha, we had 12 groups with 120 people in total. It created a sense of community very quickly.*

Equipping church, you and me, in mission to help people encounter Jesus.....God is saying to you and to your church today, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to you (me). Go therefore and make disciples...' If it turns out that you could talk to God, what would you say to Him? If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?

Prayer

Let us confess our sins to God, trusting in his mercy and forgiveness. Holy and forgiving God, we have sinned against you and each other in thought and word and deed. We have turned from your life-giving word, your great commission and ignored the message of those you sent. We are unprepared for the coming of your Son. Have mercy upon us and forgive us, that strengthened by your love we may serve you more faithfully; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 405 – Great is the darkness

1) Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in Your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies.

Ch) *Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.*

2) May now Your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim,
In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in Your name.
Help us bring light to this world,
That we might speed Your return.

3) Great celebrations on that final day,
When out of the heavens You come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrows will end,
And rulers will bow at Your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the Church of God throughout the world.....

Let us pray for those who have power and influence and for all who govern the nations.....

Let us pray for the powerless, for all victims of famine and war, and for all who strive for justice and peace.....

Let us pray for the afflicted and sorrowful and for all who need our prayers.....

Let us remember before God those who have passed from this life in faith and obedience, giving thanks for

Eternal God, through the self-offering of your Son you have filled our lives with your presence. Help us in our sufferings and trials and strengthen us in our weakness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

StF 407 – Hear the call of the kingdom

1) Hear the call of the kingdom,
Lift your eyes to the King;
Let his song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy,
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in his unfailing grace.

*Ch) King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion,
Filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

2) Hear the call of the kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven,
The humility of Christ;
Walking justly before him,
Loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through us.

3) Hear the call of the kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness,
And a hope yet to come:
Let the nations put their trust in him.

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Blessings

The day of the Lord is surely coming. Be faithful in worship, unwavering in hope, fervent in the work of God's kingdom and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Advanced notice:

This autumn/ winter, my team will be ready to help and offer training to our circuit's local churches to run Alpha. If you are interested, please talk to me as soon as possible. Remember, no two Alphas look the same.