

Prayer and Collect

Pray for 'people of peace' you can think of and others whom you haven't spotted yet. Ask God to give each of you the chance to speak with a person of peace this week. Pray for the ability to spot the 'hidden leopards', signs of God at work all around you. And perhaps allow a few minutes of silence in prayer to be attentive to the whisper of the Spirit and share anything that comes to mind afterwards.

Lord Jesus,

***you send us out into your world
to be your witnesses***

in the things we say and do.

***Grant us the help of the Holy Spirit
that we may point people to your love,
and so bring glory to you. Amen.***

Looking ahead

This week, pay close attention to those unobtrusive signs of God at work around you.

Reflections for individuals

Readings for this week

Monday = Luke 4.16-21

Tuesday = Luke 7.36-50

Wednesday = Romans 8.19-23

Thursday = John 12.31-33

Friday = 1 Corinthians 12.31-33

Everyday Witness

3

3: The God Who Goes Before Us

Icebreaker

Try to think of a time when you came across a situation where it wasn't clear what was going on or where, perhaps, you initially misunderstood what was happening. Perhaps there was a crowd gathering, people shouting or someone running. What did you think was happening at first? What did the story turn out to be? Hopefully, at least 1 or 2 people in the group will have an example to share with the others. Give the group a few minutes to think and then share whatever comes to mind. If there are several of you, you might want to do this in smaller groups of about 3.

Collect

Lord Jesus,

***you send us out into your world
to be your witnesses***

in the things we say and do.

***Grant us the help of the Holy Spirit
that we may point people to your love,
and so bring glory to you. Amen.***

Discussion

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams is quoted as saying that 'mission is about seeing what God is doing and joining in'. Take a few moments to discuss what you think the quote means. How does it make you feel? Do you agree with it? How do we find out what God is doing?

Introducing the theme (read aloud)

Archbishop Rowan's quote reminds us that whenever we think about mission, evangelism or witnessing our faith, God is already ahead of us. God is a missionary God, always reaching out in love to the whole creation.

Mike Starkey, Head of Church Growth in Manchester Diocese, tells a story about hidden leopards.

"Here's a true story from South Africa. Some game wardens from a safari park were transporting a leopard. The van got into an accident and the leopard bounded off into the suburbs of Johannesburg. So the game wardens called in hunters to trap the leopard before it caused any damage.

The hunters arrived with their rifles and searched the suburbs for a wild leopard. And on their very first night of searching, they found seven leopards all hiding in the suburbs. In other words, at least six leopards had been there all along. It's just that nobody was looking for them!

To me, that story says something about God at work in my community. What if God's already out there, touching hearts and lives? In other words, what if God's like those leopards in the suburbs of Johannesburg? There all the time – it's just that we haven't noticed."

If this is true, it means that God is already out ahead of us, working in our communities and in the lives of individuals.

So have a think together about this. What 'hidden leopards' – unobtrusive signs of God at work – are you aware of now? They could include a conversation that led to talk of God, new people joining in with church online or an open door for some kind of outreach in the community. Talk about what comes to mind.

Reading

Luke 10:1-9 (recommended version, The Message, is below)

Later the Master selected seventy and sent them ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he intended to go. He gave them this charge:

"What a huge harvest! And how few the harvest hands. So on your knees; ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands.

"On your way! But be careful—this is hazardous work. You're like lambs in a wolf pack.

"Travel light. Comb and toothbrush and no extra luggage.

"Don't loiter and make small talk with everyone you meet along the way.

"When you enter a home, greet the family, 'Peace.' If your greeting is received, then it's a good place to stay. But if it's not received, take it back and get out. Don't impose yourself.

"Stay at one home, taking your meals there, for a worker deserves three square meals. Don't move from house to house, looking for the best cook in town.

"When you enter a town and are received, eat what they set before you, heal anyone who is sick, and tell them, 'God's kingdom is right on your doorstep!'

Discussion (to read aloud)

Jesus seems to be telling us that when we go on his mission to share his good news, sometimes we will come across people who will welcome us and our message. He considers them people of peace. These peace-people are those whose in whose lives God is already at work, making them ready to find out more about him and to recognise his work in them. They may not call themselves Christians or go to church, but they are prepared for the next step on their journey towards God. This isn't by luck or chance but because God the Holy Spirit has been working, quietly and unobtrusively – like a 'hidden leopard'!

1 How do you respond to the idea that God is going ahead of us?

2 Who are the 'people of peace' you have encountered?

3 What difference does it make to how you think about being a witness when you remember that God is already going ahead of you?