

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 2: SMALL AND CELEBRATING WHO WE ARE



A series of workshops designed to help local Christians reflect on worship and mission in the context of being numerically small and filled with hope.



AIM:

To spend time reflecting on a theology of small things, and the ways in which God's love is shared through our gifts and contributions.

MISSION THINKING

In small communities every individual can be known and valued. God values each one of us, and knows and celebrates the gifts and contributions which we bring.

Mission thinking celebrates individual people and small efforts, and rejoices that in sharing who we are and what we bring, God's love is made known.



OBJECTIVES

- To value everyone in the room and celebrate each individual
- To think theologically about God's perspective on small things
- To reflect on the care needed to protect those small things
- To reflect on the theology of growth from small things



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PREPARATIONS

Space:

- If possible you need access to a cooker to heat food;
- A table/tables large enough to seat everyone in the group in a circle or square; set out as if for a party of celebration with place names for everyone.

Materials needed

- Ask everyone to bring a photo of themselves to be placed by their place on the table
- Everyone is invited to bring a favourite food to share. You will probably need to co-ordinate this, to ensure that there is a balance of starters, main course and desserts; and to let people know whether food can be heated at the venue.
- Resources needed: photocopies of the liturgy on each table, paper table cloths and pens on each table, modelling dough, candle, picture and story of Julian of Norwich, story of the yeast, enough hazelnuts for everyone to have one each.

STARTERS: CELEBRATING WHO WE ARE

OPENING WORSHIP

(Normal type is to be read by any individual; **bold** type is read by everyone and *italics* are directions)

The Welcome

Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

We give thanks for this promise, for the company of each other and for God's presence and provision for us.

God invites us here and so we greet each other,

(The sentences below are repeated for every person around the table)

(name of individual):**we welcome you to this table in the name of Christ**

(named person replies):Amen, it's good to be here.

We think about those who are not at this table today

(names of individuals are spoke out and a candle is lit)

Whatever table they are at today, we pray that they will know the presence and blessing of God

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Psalm 139 reads: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully name; I know that full well."

We confess to God the ways in which we have forgotten how wonderfully we and others have been made

Pause

For the times when we have lost patience with the weaknesses in ourselves and others,

Lord, have mercy

For the times when we have not trusted that God or others would provide for our needs.

Lord, have mercy

For the times when we have been envious of that which we think is bigger and better than what we have.

Lord, have mercy

For the times when we have been blind to the small things which bring us life.

Lord, have mercy.

THE PROMISE OF NEW BEGINNINGS

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

This is God's kingdom, as tiny as a mustard seed yet stretched far and wide. This is God's kingdom that we are a part of, let us rejoice and be glad.

Bring the first course to the table:

God, the provider of all good things we offer you thanks for the food which has been prepared for us.

We thank you, God, for making these small things wholesome to our bodies.

God, who became a small human being, limited and vulnerable, we offer you thanks for the hands that have made this food today.

We thank you, God that you know what it is like to share food with friends.

As we eat may we remember our favourite things and give thanks and praise for all that is good.

Thank you God for food and love.

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Share the first course, and while you are eating, talk together about your favourite things about church. Put them together to create new verse of the song "these are a few of my favourite things" from "The Sound of Music". Use pens and the paper table cloths to doodle lyrics.

*E.g. Old tatty hymn books and flowers on Sunday
Betty's sweet shortbread and coffee on Monday
Carols at Christmas time, choirs that sing
These are a few of our favourite things*

*If people find it hard to get going use these questions to stimulate conversation.
What about church makes you smile?
What about church is comforting?
What about church is exciting?*

MAIN COURSE: REVEALING TINY THINGS ABOUT OURSELVES

Clear away the starters and serve the main course. As people are eating, tell the story of Julian of Norwich and show the picture.

Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich was brought up and lived in Norwich in England. We don't know her real name, but we do know that she was known by some as Dame Julian, after the church in Norwich, where she lived in a tiny room as an anchoress. She was born about 1342 and lived until she was 70 years old. She managed to outlive three kings of England—Edward III, Richards II and Henry IV—and survived the 100 years war and three outbreaks of plague.

When she was in her twenties Julian became very ill and nearly died. During her illness she had visions of God, and after her recovery she became an anchoress. An anchoress is not a nun, but a woman who chooses to live the rest of her life attached to the church in a small room called a cell. Her cell had three windows—one which opened into the church, the second which was used for Julian to receive her food and give her attendant waste and the third which opened right out onto the busy streets of Norwich.

Julian had an optimistic and joyful outlook on life, based on her deep conviction of the love of God; and it would seem that she was a highly practical woman. Many people would go and visit Julian; they would meet her at her small window and seek her spiritual wisdom and counsel. Her wisdom lives on in the book she wrote in her cell, "*Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love.*" Not only is this book still

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read and enjoyed today. It is believed to be the first book to be written in English by a woman.

We are going to read a few words that Julian wrote in her book, and use them to think about smallness and God.

Once people have finished eating, the hazelnuts are passed around and the following words and responses are used.

Julian of Norwich writes: And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazelnut lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed.

And it was as round as any ball.

I looked upon it with the eye of understanding, and thought, "What may this be?"

And it was answered generally thus, "It is all that is made."

I marvelled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nought for littleness.

And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it.

And so have all things their beginning by the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it. The second that he loves it. And the third, that God keeps it.

*(Extract taken from Julian of Norwich Revelations of Divine Love
See: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.html>)*

DISCUSS together in twos or threes the following questions; again use the table cloth to write things down if it helps.

Think about the small thing, like a hazelnut: think about yourself, what do you think of when you think of this small thing and you think about yourself?

How fragile this small thing is: what kind of things could destroy it?

How do you protect the small thing you have identified within yourself?

*Allow some time for people to share their thoughts with the group if they wish, then **PRAY TOGETHER:***

Thank you God, for the small things within ourselves. Thank you that although these things are so little they can sometimes seem like nothing, yet you love them. Thank you that you made those small things, you love those small things and you keep those small things.



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The main course is cleared away. Discuss these questions together as one group

Think about the small thing, like a hazelnut:

- Think about your church community, what do you think of?
- What two small things do you all agree on when you think of church?
- In what way are these small things fragile?
- What kind of things could destroy them?
- What things protect those small things?

Pray together

Thank you, Lord, for this meal. But we know we cannot live by bread alone. We have shared it together because we need each other gathered round this table.

Repeat these responses for every person around the table

We need..... (name of individual)

Reply: And I need you

Lord God,

We thank you that we can share in your Kingdom of smallness. We thank you for Julian of Norwich: that although she lived her life in a small cell, yet her words have travelled far and wide. We thank you for our church and the small things that we hold in community. We pray that you would help us to see the potential in tiny things, just like the hazelnut, and be content in knowing that you make, love and keep these things eternally. **Amen.**

PUDDING: SEEING TINY THINGS SPREAD

The main course is cleared away and those who have made it serve pudding. Someone reads the extended parable of the yeast while people are eating dessert.

The Parable of the Yeast

It was early morning in the little village of 'baked bread'. The postman was busy fixing his flat tyre when Mrs Kneadalot scurried out of her front door in her dressing gown to her front gate. She waved frantically at him, beckoning him towards her.

"What's wrong, Mrs Kneadalot, you seem rather anxious!"

The postman wiped his greasy hands on his handkerchief then promptly blew his nose.

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"Smell what?" he said. "I don't think I can smell anything today, I have the most filthy cold." "That's the whole point" said Mrs Kneadalot. "You can't smell anything, nothing, nothing at all - there is no baking bread smell! I looked out of my bedroom window at the Baked Bread Bakery and I could see no smoke coming out of the chimney. This is terrible, something must have happened! How will we live with no bread?" Mrs Kneadalot wrung her hands and shook her head.

The postman's face fell "Oh goodness me, you are right, Mrs Kneadalot, this is terrible! I think we had better raise the alarm!"

The postman leapt onto his bike and sped off as fast as he could with his flat tyre down towards the village green. Before long the sound of the bell was tolling and the villagers were sleepily emerging from their home and making their way to the green. Everyone was sniffing the air worriedly, wondering why there was no whiff of the usual freshly baked smell of bread. By the time most of the village had gathered together PC Hovis had managed to run to the Bakery to investigate. He arrived back at the village green with a very worried expression on his face.

"I have very bad news to announce to you all, there will be no bread today, or for the foreseeable future."

The crowd murmured anxiously amongst themselves, "Why? What has happened?" PC Hovis shuffled uncomfortably from side to side. "Mr McDoodle was taken seriously ill in the middle of the night, and sadly this morning he died."

There was an audible gasp from the crowds.

PC Hovis continued, "I am sorry to say that Mr McDoodle was the only person in the village who knows how to make bread so until we can figure out what to do there will be no bread at all!" There was a stunned silence while everyone tried to take in the bad news.

Then Mrs Kneadalot spoke. "Let me into the bakery. I might need to practise a bit, but I think I can make us some bread. In fact I am sure I read something in my bible about making bread!"

The crowd muttered amongst themselves, a little unconvinced that Mrs Kneadalot could solve their problem - especially using the bible!

Feeling there was nothing to lose, PC Hovis led Mrs Kneadalot through the crowd and up to the doors of the bakery. He shook her hand and said "Good luck, you have a lot of hungry people out there, hoping you can make this work!"

Mrs Kneadalot replied, rolling up her sleeves "Well, as my Grandmother used to say, a little bit of willing can go a long way. I will see what I can do."

And so the woman took some yeast and mixed it into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough, and Jesus said this was just like the Kingdom of God.

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Say together:

Just like yeast we can spread tiny grains of goodness throughout our community. Let us give thanks and praise for all the goodness we have received this evening!

Ask those who contributed to the meal to describe these things to the group:

- How did you decide what to bring?
- How did you buy the food and cook it?

Go round the table and ask everyone:

- What part of this meal have you most enjoyed?

As pudding is cleared away and tea and coffee is served, hand out some modelling dough. The leader asks everyone to make a model of one 'small thing' that has been talked about this evening. Ask everyone:

- What are you making and why?

End the evening saying the following prayer as people hold what they have made in their hands.

Creator God, bless these small things which we hold in our hands
Keep our hearts and minds open to all you are doing
Loving God, protect these small things which we hold in our hands
Keep our ears and eyes open to all you are doing
Holding God, grow these small things which we hold in our hands for your
Kingdom
Keep our church open to all you are doing.

Serve coffee and chocolates and sing the verses you wrote to 'These are a few of our favourite things'. All help to clear away.

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