

## ***Discipleship – Spring 2012 – Week beginning 6<sup>th</sup> February***

### **Home group / study notes: Being church and bearing fruit**

*Feel free to use as much or as little as you wish. There are two parts to this week's study; praying for those not yet part of the Body of Christ, and looking at an important fruiting tree in the Bible... don't worry if you spend more time praying this week and don't 'finish'!*

**Part 1** In November, one of these studies asked you each to think of two people you know well who are not churchgoers – could be friends, family, neighbours or colleagues. Why are they not part of a church? How could you help them? A number of possible reasons were suggested: Don't feel the need; never even crossed their mind; actively unbelieving, agnostic or atheist, or of a different faith; not actually Christians even though they may assume they are; been hurt by churches in the past... etc.

Have you prayed for these people consistently? Seen any results in their openness or circumstances, or even the miracle of new faith? If so remember to give thanks and pray for their protection.

Also, from Mark 8:27-29, what *you* can say from the heart about what your faith means to you that will affect those you thought about above? Have you taken any opportunity to share with them? If not, why not?

If you are new to these studies, or you had forgotten about praying for these people, don't do guilt or worry, just start right now!

*Have a time of prayer for people we know who are struggling to make sense of life; not just a list of their needs, but specifically for a faith response. Remember last week's verse from Ps 37: 'Commit your way to the Lord... and he will grant you your heart's desire'. Pray for people's hearts' desires – which they themselves may not yet recognise. Give thanks for those in whom we see signs of new or renewed faith.*

**Part 2 Read:** Genesis 3:1-5 Which tree's fruit are the man and woman not to eat? Which other tree is in the middle of the garden (Chapter 2)? Were they allowed to eat from this tree? Why were they banished from the garden at the end of Genesis 3? (*Don't worry if you can't answer this yet, just have a bit of a brainstorm*)

This tree (The Greek work is xulos – 'wood') occurs in three other places – all in Revelation. **Read** Rev 2:7; 22:1-5; 22:18-21

Interesting that this occurs at the beginning and the end of Scripture (*remind you of anything Jesus said: 'I am...' also in Rev 22?*)

From your reading of the Revelation passages, what could the 'Tree of Life' refer to?

**Read** (*again – it has cropped up several times in these Discipleship studies*) 1 Peter 2:24-25. Note that the word translated 'cross' is actually 'xulos' again.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has traditionally understood the tree of life in Genesis as prefiguring the Cross, of which humanity could not partake until after the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus – I find this really helpful.

Here is an Orthodox chant for the days just before Christmas:

*'Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened for all. The tree of life has blossomed forth from the Virgin; for her womb appeared as a spiritual paradise in which is planted the divine Plant, whereof eating we shall live and not die as did Adam. Christ shall be born, raising the image that fell of old.'*

**Give thanks** for God's great rescue plan, to reverse the fall and the curse brought about through our human nature. **Ask him** to set us completely free to be his church effectively, and to want to share the secret of the freedom we enjoy in Christ. Why not use Rev 22:1-6 as a 'Lectio Divina'? See instructions in previous studies.