**Welcome,** wherever you are from, to this, the first session in our course! It’s called ‘God’s Calling’ and tonight we’re going to think about this idea of what we are called to do:

So our question to consider for the next few minutes:

**How can our faith have an impact in a complex and hurting culture?**

Our faith teaches us two important things:

* All people are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27)
* Our encounters with others are inseparable from our relationship to Christ  (Matthew 25:31-46)

But we live in a world which is complex and messy and we can struggle to know how to live out these realities. We see broken relationship everywhere – in family breakdown, in divides of class, education, ethnicity and age in our communities. We see it at work, at the school gate and, yes, in our churches. We’ve even forgotten how to relate well to ourselves.  Many scientists say that a lot of this is unsurprising – because ‘fear of the other’ is in our DNA – which sounds a bit fatalistic. But yes, sometimes it can feel like we’re trapped in a story where we know the ending, and it doesn’t look good.

We all know the story of the Fall: the perfect garden, the perfect harmony of relationship with God – that lovely image of Adam walking in the cool of the evening in the garden with God, the happiness of Adam and Eve in good relationship with each other – with themselves and with their environment.

And then humanity forgets that God is for them, in every way, and there is the grab for power to set them apart and it all unwinds: the garden becomes a place to hide from God, there is suspicion, there is shame, there is finger pointing, anger and blame. It’s a powerful illustration of humanity’s struggle to maintain good relationship. Even people who have never read the Bible know it.

But it comes right at the start of a much bigger story: what follows, in the Old and the New Testaments, is God relentlessly calling us ***back into*** relationship. The story stretches from Genesis to Revelation, where John tells us about his vision of the ultimate healing of all wounds. The tree of life bears leaves ‘for the healing of the nations’ (Rev 22:2) and there is perfect unity between God and human beings, who ‘see his face’ and have his name on their foreheads. (Rev 22:4)

So we find in Scripture a bigger story, one that we are invited to be a part of.

It is a story about the restoration of relationship, renewal, transformation. Healing what has been broken.

The story of good relationship *isn’t* over as soon as it begins: we live in between the wholeness that God intended in the beginning and the ultimate restoration of all things, of heaven and of earth. In the centre of the story is Jesus - God is one just like us. In Jesus, God becomes enmeshed in our dysfunctional world: Jesus is exposed to it all - to the great good of human experience and all the limitations, fragility and mess. In Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension we see in this one life how God ***reaches out to us*** to restore relationship with us.

Jesus set the example for living in a fragmented world. He broke down walls, crossed divides and saw the face of God in the other – the stranger – the enemy.

**Class divisions:** Jesus operates a preference for the poor

**Moral divisions :** Jesus the rabbi who eats with sinners

**Religious divisions:** Jesus the Jewish man who praises a Samaritan

**Age divisions:** Jesus the adult, who listens to children and acknowledges their worth

**Gender divisions:** Jesus the resurrected Christ who first appears to a woman

**Poverty divisions:** Jesus, fully able, fully integrated in society, associates himself with the hungry, the prisoner, the sick – ‘what ever you did to the least of these, you did to me’

**Power divisions:** Jesus the accused says Father forgive them

God is not absent in the complexity and division but is fully present, working powerfully to transform them. Jesus wasn’t determined by the boundaries of the culture, but set an example that *moved beyond* dividing walls, demonstrated a *different* value system and an *alternative way* to the prevailing culture.

As Paul writes to the Ephesians:

**‘For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.’** (Ephesians 2:14).

**The Role of the Church**

Disciples of Jesus are somehow to find a way to express our restored relationship with God through every aspect of our lives. Following Jesus means letting him lead us into the heart of the divides which He can transform.

If conflict and ‘fear of the other’ seem to be ingrained in the DNA of human living, reconciliation is in the DNA of the disciple.

We are entrusted with the message of reconciliation and living out this calling is the meaning of being an ambassador for Christ.



**READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18 - 20**

**‘So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.’**

It is of critical importance to understand that as reconcilers we are called to be fully human – not superhuman. Recognising that none of us is invincible or infallible but also that God *can work* through each of us, even me.

In fact, our brokenness and our rubbish are the very things that will help us be reconcilers, if we can be curious about them.

The Bible tells the story of many broken, vulnerable people who become the instruments of God’s grace.  This call to be reconcilers includes embracing our full human-ness – as people who are fractured, fragile, forgiven works in progress. We have hope because God is at work in brokenness (2 Corinthians 12:9- 11) and He makes all things new (Revelation 21:5)

Our call is to work with God.