**JONAH : TWO POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR HOUSEGROUPS TO DISCUSS**

1. **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHOSEN PEOPLE?**

**A. The Jews thought being a chosen people meant primarily keeping yourself separate from other races** - they viewed non-Jews as ‘unclean’ and avoided mixing with them

They often stated how God wanted them to punish or destroy other races. There are 100 passages in the O.T. which have God expressly commanding the killing of people - some of these passages have been described as ‘**God’s genocides’ .** For example:

e.g. ‘Drive out before you many nations...you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy…. Completely destroy them as the Lord God has commanded you.’ (Deuteronomy 7: 2)

Many atheists have used passages like this to denounce Christianity even though the passages are from the O.T. rather than N.T. - and they do so because of the importance attached to the O.T. by Christians

**B. The early Christians thought being a chosen people meant going out to influence the peoples of all nations** - Christians were told not to hide the light of God but display it. They were to go out and, like salt poured onto a meal, offer the world a new flavour. What set you apart was that you belonged to the Kingdom of God and so you drew your beliefs and behaviour from that Kingdom and not a particular society. You were **IN** the world but not **OF** the world.

They often expressed how God loved everyone, regardless off their race. There are many, many passages in the N.T. which say that God wants to show his love to all races. The passages quoted on Sunday were:

* I Romans 10 v13 There is no distinction between Jew and Greek for the same Lord is Lord of all
* Colossians 3 v1 There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman’
* Galatians 3 v 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free an, there is neither make nor female ; for you are all one in Christ Jesus

AND

* 1 John 2 v 11 : the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Fundamental to View B is that God is **‘ a God of mercy’** and he is a God who offers his mercy to all . The phrase ‘a God of mercy’ features in the communion service.

View B explains why many Christians use the phrase **‘chosen to serve’ .**

**Please note: View B. was not invented by Christians - it is also present in the Old Testament (it’s just there less obviously than View A)**

For example:

* There are many references in the O.T. to God being merciful
* A number of OT stories show God having a concern for what other nations are doing
* The Book of Ruth is a story about a foreigner who is close to God
* Some passages invoke kindness to foreigners: e.g. Do not mistreat or oppress foreigner’ (Exodus 22) or ‘When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them.’ (Leviticus 19)

**The story of Jonah** highlights a man who is brought up in one tradition (the one where God wants you to avoid foreigners and hates foreigners) and struggles when he finds God is asking him to mix with foreigners and help foreigners by showing them the right way to live.

Jonah tries to avoid doing what God wants (hence the whale, etc ) and when he is forced to do what God wants, he remains unhappy about it. When the foreigners respond positively to his preaching, he is horrified. He does not want God to be merciful to non-Jews! In Jonah 4 : 1 we read:

‘Jonah was greatly displeased and angry’

**Clearly what Jesus did and said is vital as to why the early Christians adopted View B rather than View A. So - what do you think Jesus did and said on this issue?**

**The passage from Acts 10 v 9-16, 24-35 reflects how the risen Christ spoke to Peter and changed his view from View A to View B. What do you draw from that passage in Acts?**

**2. WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RESPONSE AS CHRISTIANS TO THE RACIAL/RELIGIOUS/CULTURAL TENSIONS WE SEE IN THE WORLD AROUND US?**

Christians are going to disagree on solutions but **can we all agree on certain basic principles that should lie behind whatever we do?**

I suggested three ‘foundations’ for our Christian path through life’s complicated issues. **Groups might like to discuss one or more of those - or come up with others?**

The three I gave were:

1. **That we are called to be in the world but not of it.**

We are a people chosen to serve in the world, seeing everyone as our neighbour

We are a people set apart - because our values are not those of the UK or the EU or society in general. Our values are the values of the Kingdom of God.

**2. That, whatever our concerns or dislikes, we should never treat anyone as if they do not matter .**

Everyone is a child of God and of worth in the eyes of God.

We might not know *how* best to deal with a situation but the parable of the Good Samaritan tells us that is not an excuse for just standing on the sideline or ignoring what is going on around us.

**3. That we must through our prayers keep our minds open to the voice of God**

There are plenty of clamouring voices saying we should do this or that and its easy to not always hear what God might be saying to us.

We need to pray and reflect - even if at times God’s voice can seem very distant;

We need to also appreciate that there may be times when God tell us, like he did Jonah, to say and do things that are out of our comfort zone!

**THE TWO PRAYERS USED WITHIN THE SERMON**

Some people asked for a copy of them. The first was taken from a Toc H prayer which reads in its entirety:

Father, who hast made all men in thy likeness

and lovest all whom thou hast made,

suffer not our family to separate itself from thee

by building barriers of race and colour.

As thy Son, our Saviour, was born of a Hebrew mother,

but rejoiced in the faith of a Syrian woman

and of a Roman soldier,

welcomed the Greeks who sought him,

and suffered a man from Africa to carry his cross,

so teach us to regard the members of all races

as fellow-heirs of the kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The second was just written by me:

Dear Lord,

we who are divided,

we who at times are unloving and prejudiced,

we who are inclined to misunderstanding and who can so easily be led into intolerance,

seek your wisdom and your love.

Make us more united,

make us more open and understanding,

make us more tolerant, more forgiving,

Above all, make us more loving.

May your Spirit be present in us as we make our judgements and voice our views

Help us to be worthy of the name ‘Christian’.

**G.M. Best**