

Lent study group @ Eccles
Christ and the Chocolaterie

Wednesday 25 March: Week 4: Getting real: The power of acceptance

In Eccles, we have been following a Lent course designed by Hilary Brand and based on the 2000 film *Chocolat*. As we are currently unable to gather together, these materials are provided in lieu of the session on Wednesday 25 March. You are welcome to use them individually, for personal reflection – or, if you are online, to join us for a ‘virtual’ study group at 2.30pm on Wednesday 25 March via ‘Zoom.’ It’s easy – all you need is a phone or computer with a camera and a microphone. Contact Rev Naomi (naomi.oates@methodist.org.uk / 01732 875 072) for details and an invitation.

In previous sessions, we’ve looked at ‘Giving up: The prelude to change,’ ‘Giving out: The power of a gift’ and ‘Getting wise: The possibility of change.’

Clip

If you have access to the film *Chocolat*, watch from 35:08 (just after ‘You make the most wonderful chocolate’) to 38:45 (just after ‘Goodnight, mama’). In this clip, Vianne, the owner of the chocolaterie, tells her daughter Anouk the story of her grandparents’ marriage.



To ponder

- Vianne gives the residents of this sleepy French village quite a shock when she arrives! Part of this is that she refuses to attend church. Instead, we learn about her Mayan roots, the spirit of her mother that calls her on to new adventures, and her mysterious ways with chocolate. How would you feel if you met someone like Vianne, whose experience and beliefs are very different from your own? Would you be curious, or keep her at arm's length?
- When you meet someone with a different religion or beliefs from your own, do you look for similarities or differences?
- Think about your experience of different Christian denominations – for instance, have you attended a very different kind of church while on holiday? Did anything make you feel uncomfortable? Was there anything you particularly enjoyed? What did you learn about how you see God, or how you prefer to worship?

Shopping list

Imagine you were someone without a particular belief system, 'shopping around' for some kind of faith community. What would you look for? (For instance, in the people you met, the way they practised their faith, the beliefs they held, the way they behaved towards you, the activities on offer, etc). Write a list.

How does this list compare to your local church?

Clip

If you have access to the film, watch from 50:08 (just after a child calls 'Hey, look') to 56:27 (just after the Comte says '... but we can help them to understand they are not welcome').



To ponder

The Comte (the mayor) tells the villagers to help Roux and his fellow travellers, currently encamped by the river, to ‘understand that they are not welcome’ in the village. They do so by putting up posters ‘banning immorality’ and, for instance, refusing to serve one of the visiting children a cup of water. Serge interprets the Comte’s words to disastrous effect, setting fire to their boats and endangering lives.

Have you ever ‘helped someone to feel they are not welcome’? Is there ever a good reason to do so? (One of Hilary Brand’s suggestions is ‘In a Lent group, if someone is so unruly or disruptive that it ruins the whole group!’)

Roux, with his long experience on the margins of society, when he meets Vianne assumes that she is going to accuse him of wrongdoing or try to convert him (‘Which idea are you selling?’).

A vital part of the calling of the Methodist Church is evangelism. How does that word make you feel? How can we share our faith in a positive, and not a negative, way?

St Francis of Assisi is rumoured to have said: ‘Preach the gospel. Use words if necessary.’ What do you think he meant?

Meditation

Read Mark 12:28-31 and take a moment to sit quietly with the words.

To ponder

Why do you think Jesus put ‘loving God’ first? Is there anything about the process – loving God *first* – that enables you to love your neighbour better?

Read Matthew 5:43-8 and take a moment to sit quietly with the words.

What do you think Jesus meant by 'be perfect'? Is such a thing possible?

If we managed to live out the ideas in this passage, would we need to use words to share our faith? How important is it to talk to other people about God?

Spend a few moments in silence reflecting on the thoughts and questions this session has raised for you.

Prayer

Lord, we acknowledge that who we are speaks far louder than what we say, or even what we do.

Help us to accept ourselves fully, as God accepts us,
so that we may accept others fully, as God accepts them.

Help us to forgive ourselves fully, as God forgives us,
so that we may forgive others fully as a token of the forgiveness God
wants them to receive.

Help us to be quicker to celebrate difference than to condemn it.
In the name of the loving, forgiving, accepting Christ. Amen.

*These notes have been produced by the Revd Naomi Oates and are based upon
Christ and the Chocolaterie: A Lent Course © Hilary Brand (London: Darton,
Longman & Todd Ltd, 2007).*