



**OPENING PRAYER:** Pray for any personal needs of your group, church, community, etc.

**NOTE:** Our insights are important so remember to respect each other's thoughts/reflections.

**DISCUSSION:**

God went undercover in the form of a lowly carpenter who, even as a rabbi, chose to serve others rather than ask others to serve him. This confused leaders around him and their frustrations with his servant leadership is what led him to be crucified.

- Share what of Jesus either teachings or actions that displayed servant leadership you might celebrate – and that perhaps you might also find challenging to live out as a Christian.

As we begin the season of Advent, here's some interesting points. Advent was always considered a period of fasting, known also as the Nativity Fast or the Fast of December. According to some, Advent began in the 5th century when Bishop Perpetuus said for Christians to begin on a saint's day (11<sup>th</sup> November).

Although in the church this time is known as a "*penitent season*", in 1963 the wider church wanted to differentiate the penitent spirit of Lent from that of Advent. It therefore began emphasising Advent as a *season of hope* for Christ's coming now as a promise of his Second Coming.

**READ:** Luke 21.25-38 (Discuss as many or as few of the following questions as you wish)

- At the present time, there is a lot of interest in the end of history as we know it. This might be thoughts around Jesus return, ecological disasters or nuclear wars. Do you find talk of end times helpful? How might we engage in conversation with people about such claims?
- What do you think of – or feel about – the way Jesus states he will return? How would you respond to someone asking if you believe this?
- Verse 34 encourages followers to be on their guard and alert. What do you feel it means for Christians to be on their guard/alert?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

- **CHURCH FUNCTIONS:** [Christmas Services](#) – pray that God would send people to hear the good news of his love that pursues them
- **OTHER CHURCHES:** [pray for Life Centre Church, Church Unlimited, Living Water Baptist](#)
- **VISION 2021** – [refer your VISION 2021](#) – please choose another area to pray for - close as a group by saying the prayer from the back of the booklet

Lord God, thank you for helping us be a hospitable and loving church.  
Our love for you leads us to live generously with our finances, resources, gifts, time  
and our lives. Help us receive, own and carry out this vision so that,  
we may develop Spiritual Growth and Financial Independence for your glory.  
Amen

## Undercover God • John 18.33-37

Christ the King is the last Sunday before Advent which begins a new liturgical year.

Pope Paul the 6th came up with this in 1925 before beginning the season of Advent, in response to the perception of growing secularism.

I was with the folks at ARCARE discussing why we celebrate Christ the king.

It might seem a *little* strange right before Christmas.

Stranger still with the conversation we just heard between Jesus and Pontius Pilate

You might think we should be concluding with his death, burial and resurrection; however, we're reading about the events leading up to Jesus crucifixion.

You might think we should at least hear about Jesus on a heavenly throne surrounded by angels and all the nations before him.

Instead, we hear of a conversation that led to the great finale of Jesus earthly existence. A conversation with a person who couldn't see Jesus for the king he was.

We're reminded to celebrate the fragile entrance of God within our world - and those who saw what God was doing even when God went undercover in many ways

We're reminded to see Christ the King – *beyond the external and into the eternal*

Not to be exalted in this life, but to go undercover as the outcast - "the least of these" – so the world would experience his true nature as *Immanuel, God is with us*

Who has seen Undercover Boss where a boss acts like a new employee?

They make themselves over so no one will recognise who they are.

Through their time, they learn about their employees as they work with them.

There are emotional times as they learn about the lives of their people - there are awkward times as they find people not doing what they are meant to.

While the show sometime catches people out for things they do wrong, it's really neat when they catch people doing something right – then bless them for it.

Here's a few benefits for the boss' going undercover.

- Experience firsthand what employees deal with
- Show employees they are valued and appreciated
- Spend time getting to know employees
- Nurture employee talents and dreams
- Invite employees to share feedback and ideas
- Reveal your true/authentic self

The Undercover Boss show helps reveal the nature of the Boss - as well as the employees.

When we see the employees do well – we're excited for them. We know they'll be blessed

We also know when we hear the employee criticize the boss or see that they're lazy – there's an unsettling conversation that's coming when the boss reveals themselves.

Today we're reminded how God went undercover to reveal *who God is - and who we are*

That we will be blessed if we *do well for the kingdom* – but there's a hard conversation that might need to take place if we're criticising the boss or being lazy in our faith.

Looking at Jesus' discussion with Pilate, it's about Jesus' kingdom of truth and seeking truth

With hindsight, we know Jesus is the majestic, exalted Judge and King - yet we also know, *his identity was hidden within those as the poor, the needy, and the marginalised.*

Jesus' truth challenged Pilate and the religious leaders who judged the outward appearance

God went undercover to reveal how the world responds to peripheral appearances.

Jesus pointed out - those who seek truth will ask what lies beneath mere appearances.

Jesus' ministry of healings, teachings and interactions were constantly about those who saw God's kingdom in and through him - and those who did not.

Those who desired truth opposed to those who lived by their own truth

Those who saw the truth of God's kingdom in serving others – and those who did not.

*Seeing, having compassion, and acting* is the expression of Jesus' ministry and the expression he expected from his followers.

This is the truth Jesus shared with Pilate of his kingdom - *For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.*

We're wired to be visual in many ways, but Christ's truth goes beyond the visual.

Sin makes us bend Christ's truth and kingdom to *serve our needs rather than serve God.*

Yet Jesus came as a servant to see whether his people would welcome him when he came in ways, situations and people they weren't comfortable with.

Would they serve him, as a mighty king, when he comes without the throne and instead, comes in the lives of the poor, the needy and the outcast?

The Undercover bosses don't tell people they're coming as they want to see the employee's true natures without the persona that tries to impress the bosses.

The issue we face in church and as Christians is similar – we can tend to put on our facade. Certainly, some behaviours we express when we were alone and angry, sad, frustrated, etc – aren't appropriate for expressing around others – well done for controlling those.

However – are we being honest and open to reveal the person we are – more than this – are we willing to love others for who they are beyond first appearances?

One thing I struggle with is, instead of letting scripture bend my heart to God's truth, is that it is much easier to try and bend scripture and Jesus message towards the truth I desire.

Instead of seeking a heart to serve others, I expect Jesus to see and serve my needs.

This leaves me seeking my own comfort - it perpetuates my blindness to others real needs – as it creates a blindness to seeing Jesus in those who are in need.

Phillip Yancey and his wife visited a hospital in Nepal - missionaries worked binding wounds and distributing food.

One day Phillip looked across a courtyard and saw a person with leprosy.

He described this woman as the ugliest person as she had no fingers and no toes, scars with calloused eyes. Her nose was eaten away and you could see into her skull.

She could not walk - she dragged her body behind her to get where she wanted.

He thought she must be a beggar and was about to give her money – his wife gave, *what he says was a much holier response*, she went over put her arm around her.

The woman sang in Nepalese – Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so.

The doctor then said – *“let me introduce you to dun maya, the closest thing we have to a saint, a prayer warrior, if you need prayers she is the one to ask to pray for you”*.

Phillip said his initial response was to judge her as a failure using the same measure the world uses as she has no beauty and no wealth.

His eyes were opened - he saw the Spirit of God so strongly within her that she exuded the presence of God.

If church isn't a safe place to lower the mask, then where is? Jesus went undercover to let his followers reveal their true heart – in all its ugliness – *so that*, it could be redeemed.

Sometimes employees perceive things wrong as they have an attitude – sometimes bosses miscommunicate – sometimes employees are just overwhelmed by the task

This is the same in living for Christ - in living to serve God's kingdom need in our world – sometimes it can *just get overwhelming seeking God's truth and living for the Kingdom*

Ivan Satyavrata is a pastor in India who feeds around 10,000 people every day

He was asked how he was not overwhelmed by the enormous need. He responds:

*There is something about need, pain, and suffering that brings out what is beautiful within ordinary people. The philanthropic tourists are drawn by Kolkata's "beautiful" poor, although their best skills and efforts are often dwarfed by the overwhelming need around them. But even the feeblest and faltering efforts of a genuine dispenser of grace almost always succeed in touching and making a difference in someone's life. What is amazing is that many of those who give of themselves inevitably find their own healing, purpose, and joy through their Kolkata experience. We have seen it happen over and over again—broken people experiencing God's kingdom miracle of grace as they discover with surprise that it is more blessed to give than to receive.*

It is natural to feel overwhelmed by the need in serving God's people and his kingdom.

It is natural to seek comfort or to change Jesus truth, so it serves us rather than we serve it

Yet we do this at the cost of **seeing** Jesus, letting our hearts fill with **compassion** and **experiencing** the kingdom miracle of transforming the life of others and being transformed.

A guy I know was told two miracles would take place as he worked with the poor.

**Miracle A - the lives of others are transformed through your efforts and service**

**Miracle B – your life will be transformed through those you help**

The true miracle of Christmas isn't that God came undercover – it's that the same God who came in Jesus – now through his Spirit, resides in us

We're called to be an expression of truth - let's pray our lives are transformed by our undercover King this Christmas that we may be the miracle of Christ's ongoing presence

Let's pray ...