

Be More Jesus

Having consulted with all the stakeholders, Bury Church of England Primary School agreed that the following core values would permeate the whole school life from pupils to staff, including governors and parent volunteers. The core values are: Love; Forgiveness; Honesty; Respect.

The following is a working paper to offer some theological grounding on which the core values are based.

I have taken time to reflect on the core values and I offer 'Be More Jesus' as a working title. As I think about the core values of love, forgiveness, honesty, and respect, these are all captured in the heart of Jesus. Adopting these values as individuals will enable us all to 'Be More Jesus'. As the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Philippi, he encourages them with these words: Philippians 2:1-2 **Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.** This is an invitation to Be More Jesus! The life of Jesus is an example of what a life wholly surrendered to God can look like. It is a life of Love, Forgiveness, Honesty and Respect.

How can we 'Be More Jesus'? We begin to answer that question by going back to the beginning - it is the way God made us when he created us in his image and likeness. It is our default setting.

The telling of the creation story in Genesis Ch 1 reminds us that God made everything and as the crown of His creation he made you and I. God made you and I to be one with Him to enjoy living in fellowship and communion with him. To be one with God means covenant and in covenant two become one. We all need to have that sense of connectedness to the one who made us in His image. Genesis 1:27 **'So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he Created him; male and female He created them'.** Image = imprint, God leaves the imprint of His hand upon us and it is always only ever meant to be filled with His presence.

Love - Whenever we encounter God, we encounter Love. The Love of God has a firm basis in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament it is primarily directed to a people group whereas in The New Testament, we become increasingly aware that alongside Jesus, we are the focus of God's love. John 3:16-17 states, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.'

The most significant aspect of the statement that God so loved the world that he gave his Son is not that God loved, but that he loved so comprehensively. Therefore we are also called to love, but not just to love, but to love comprehensively. We make a choice to love without measure and although we are all different and even maybe don't always agree with one another, we choose to keep our love on towards one another for as John's letter remind us in 1 John 4:7-8 'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.' We love because God is love and as ones made in God's image and likeness, we follow the example of Jesus who as the writer of Hebrews reminds us:

The Passion Translation Hebrews 1:3 'The Son is the dazzling radiance of God's splendour, the exact expression of God's true nature—his mirror image! He holds the universe together and expands it[d] by the mighty power of his spoken word. He accomplished for us the complete cleansing of sins, and then took his seat on the highest throne at the right hand of the majestic One.'

New International Version Hebrews 1:3 'The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.'

Forgiveness is high on God's agenda as is love. If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Saviour. The central theme weaved throughout Luke's Gospel is Salvation, the Gospel of Luke would be better titled 'The Gospel of Salvation.' These powerful, mind blowing words that Jesus speaks in Luke's Gospel 23:34 Jesus said, 'Father forgive them' are at the heart of what the good news of God is all about – forgiveness. As people making up a school community with a desire to flourish, forgiveness will play an important part in that aim. Forgiveness is something we all need to receive and to give.

Forgiveness is an act of the heart. You can decide in your mind to forgive someone because it is the 'proper & right' thing to do but freely forgiving from the heart is something entirely different. Someone once said, 'It is a spiritually healthy heart that bears the fruit of forgiveness... we can't manufacture forgiveness in our hearts, but we can grow it. We can cultivate a heart of forgiveness. If we keep the soil of our hearts fertilized with scriptural truth, if we keep it soft with prayer and worship, and if we quickly pull out the weeds of bitterness and hostility, the forgiveness of God will grow in our hearts.'

As Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, an important part of that lesson is the importance of forgiveness. Luke 11:4 **Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.** (or trespasses) Whenever we pray this part of the Lord's Prayer, we are asking that God will forgive us to the same extent we are prepared to forgive others.

In Matthew's Gospel, Peter asks Jesus about the quantity of forgiveness. Matthew 18:21-22 **Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**

The Jewish rabbis at the time taught that forgiving someone more than three times was unnecessary. Peter offers to forgive more than double the requirement and adds an extra one more time to forgive on top for good measure. Jesus responds that forgiveness should be offered four hundred and ninety times, far beyond that which Peter was proposing. Although they had been with Jesus for some time, they were still thinking in the limited terms of the law, rather than in the unlimited terms of grace. The four and ninety times is intended to remind us of the unlimited nature of forgiveness. Ephesians 4:31-32 **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

Honesty is highlighted for us in the 10 Commandments. Exodus 20:16 says, **You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.** The 10 Commandments have been the basis for the laws of the land for centuries. The Commandments are there to enable us as people to flourish in our relationship with God and to flourish in our relationships with one another. It is often said that 'honesty is the best policy', it is not just the best policy, but it is one of God's 'policies' which enables people and community to flourish.

Philippians 4:8 **Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.** Elsewhere in Ephesians 4, Paul encourages the community to speak the truth in love. Christians often talk about the need to "speak the

truth in love,” a command found in Ephesians 4:15. What is meant here is the need to be honest and share truth, however difficult it may be to hear in a gentle, kind, inoffensive way. Difficult things are best heard when our defences are not up. In a loving, non-threatening environment, hard truths are more readily received. As the Proverb says 12:17 **An honest witness tells the truth but a false witness tells lies.**

Paul writes about unity in the body of Christ as he urges the Ephesians, to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). This life of unity is within reach when we are humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love, and making efforts toward unity. Honesty in this kind of community would find a place of welcome amongst its people enabling them to flourish even more.

Respect is from the Greek word for honour or value. Whenever we respect someone or someone’s belongings or property it literally means to place a great value or high price on someone or something. In 1 Peter 2:17 we are encouraged to, **Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.** Whenever we remember that we are all made in God’s image and likeness we cannot fail to offer respect to one another for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

We are encouraged to honour/respect: our parents Deut 5:16; Matthew 19:19 **‘Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord Your God is giving you’.** There is a biblical principle at work here which suggest that honour releases life.

We are encouraged to honour widows, emperor, elders, elderly, masters, slaves, wives, those of lower status/rank in life are all to be honoured.

We are encouraged to Honour all people equally regardless of their status in society. Romans 12:10 **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Respect/Honour one another above yourselves.** Whenever we respect/honour someone, we fix the value of that person and the value we should fix on them is something higher than we fix on ourselves. We constantly need to come in low adopting an attitude of humility. When we honour someone, and we talk about creating a culture of respect/honour it is primarily about celebrating who a person is.

As a school community with a desire and conviction to take to heart the core values of Love, Forgiveness, Honesty, and Respect I believe that a legacy will be set which will positively influence generations to come encouraging one another and those who follow on creating a Christian distinctiveness to Be More Jesus.