



# Grace 2021 – week 7

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## God's grace for the church - 1

w/c 21 March 2021

*"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)*

### Read 1 Kings 19:1-18

Elijah's ministry came at a critical time in the story of the ancient Jewish states. While we must be careful not to overly liken our own country or the church to those kingdoms, there is a sense that we too are in the middle of a major shift. We know that what was in the past has gone, but do not yet see what the future will hold. How do we discern the difference between unchanging truths and what were simply the old ways of doing and being?

In our 2018 parish profile we described our current situation as: *"We see that the church today must exist in a world where it cannot expect privilege nor claim a right to moralise and where many we encounter will simply not accept that we can point them to 'the truth'."*

Martyn Snow, the Bishop of Leicester, posed the following question back in 2019: *"Could it be that the move of the church to the margins of society is a move of God?"* Does this approach help the church share grace with others? How do you see it?

### Read Romans 11:1-12

Recently I have been looking at the newly published Church of England's vision for the 2020s. I can only touch on a couple of elements here; do look at the full initiative using the link below<sup>1</sup>. It looks towards a church that is **Christ-centred** and **Jesus-shaped**, encouraging us to be communities whose identity is derived from our focus being on the centre – on Christ. This means stepping back from any over-emphasis on our boundaries – on those things that separate, that differentiate us from others. How might this approach help us both be better church and also be better at bringing others into the kingdom?

The vision also looks for us to become a church of **missionary disciples**: we are *called* in order to be *sent* and to be *changed*. We might see these as the actions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively. Do remember that being a disciple in the biblical world is much more than being a student in the modern sense, as well as learning, one would seek to actively imitate the life of the master. How does this three-fold (called, sent, changed) nature of our life affect how we see our interactions with others?

Surrounding all, the vision hopes for a church that is **simpler**, **humbler** and **bolder**. How do Stephen Croft's words below, linking these concepts back to the beatitudes, help us root them in our church life, being as he describes it, a "grace-filled community"?

*"Our call to be a simpler, humbler and bolder church is therefore rooted in the beatitudes. To be simpler means to be pure in heart; to set mercy at the centre and as our highest aim. To be humbler means to be poor in spirit, to be meek, to mourn for the needs of the world. To be bolder means to have the courage to hunger and thirst for justice, to seek peace and reconciliation, to stand our ground when we face opposition." (Stephen Croft, Bishop of Oxford)*

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<sup>1</sup> New CofE vision: <https://www.churchofengland.org/aboutleadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-church-england-2020s>