

Fitzroy Epic Sunday: 1st June 2025

How do we follow in the footsteps of Jesus?

Summary of discussion based on facilitators' responses

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Executive Summary

An 'Epic Sunday' took place on Sunday 1st June 2025, during which the congregation met in 14 small groups and had around 45 minutes, in the central part of the service, to explore the questions related to how we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Kirk Session committed to explore this question because of a Saturday morning session with Andy Hickford in January 2025, which focussed on how Fitzroy disciples its members and develops them for leadership.

The Epic Sunday was the first step in exploring this topic with the congregation of Fitzroy. The feedback will be used by the minister and Kirk Session to provide the spiritual leadership and support which strengthen all of us in how we live out our Christian faith. This will be critical during the next two to three years as Fitzroy undergoes a significant transition as Steve retires and a new minister is appointed.

The most common themes from the discussion groups were:

- **Connection points:** In general, there was agreement that Fitzroy creates ways for people to meet and engage. Intergenerational connection was especially important.
- **Home / small groups:** Home / small groups are considered to be important for connection with others, deeper conversation and pastoral care. However, many people are unclear about what home groups exist, and how one can be joined (and sometimes exactly what happens in them, or what is expected of a new member).
- **Studying the Bible:** There was widespread comment on the value of Bible study which covered lots of different aspects. These included how young people, young adults and / or people new to faith can understand the 'basics', as well as how the Bible can be studied and understood in greater depth by the whole community and embedded in teaching during the church year.
- **Communication:** Clearer communication received frequent comment, with requests for communication of events and activities to be increased, using various media, with the availability of a long-term calendar. Kirk Session could communicate more about direction and decisions.
- **Discussion and dialogue:** The response to the approach taken on the Epic Sunday was generally very positive, with many people saying we should do something like that more often.

1. Context and Reporting

An 'Epic Sunday' took place on Sunday 1st June 2025, during which the congregation met in 14 small groups and had around 45 minutes, in the central part of the service, to get to know each other and respond to three key questions.

The objectives were to:

- Create space for sharing about what it looks like for each of us to follow Jesus, and what it means for us to do so together as a community
- Create space for discussion and reflection on how being part of a faith community assists following Jesus
- Allow space for consideration of how our faith community might assist that more
- Use the content of this discussion to help inform and shape the next couple of years' activity in Fitzroy, in terms of spiritual formation

In short, *how do we follow in the footsteps of Jesus?*

The time in the small groups included:

- Introductions and ice breaker question
- Opportunity for each group member to briefly respond to what it means for them to follow Jesus
- Discussion and reflection on how being part of a faith community assists people to follow Jesus, both individually and together
- Consideration of how our faith community might better assist following Jesus. What else / different might happen?

The objectives for the morning were primarily about creating space for people to connect. It also offered an opportunity for responses to be collected, considered, and fed into the next few years' activity in Fitzroy. Each group facilitator was asked to write brief notes on the responses from their group, in response to seven questions:

- In very general terms, how did that go? How did people respond?
- What general themes emerged from the question, 'what does following in the footsteps of Jesus mean for you?'
- What general themes emerged from discussion of the question, 'how does being part of a faith community help you to follow Jesus?'
- What general themes emerged from discussion of the question, 'how might Fitzroy better help you follow Jesus?'
- In general, what went well with this approach? What might have been better if?
- What might be helpful in the future for events like this?
- Is there anything else, related to this area, that you would like Kirk Session to know?

These questions form the basis for this report. While this report has attempted to accurately and honestly summarise the main themes expressed, some weaknesses should be acknowledged:

- Facilitators were not (and cannot be) 100% accurate in their note taking
- Some facilitators wrote extensive responses, while others were more concise
- Summarising facilitators' responses cannot be completed with 100% accuracy

It is also worth noting that this report is only one piece in the jigsaw going forward. It is both a record of discussion *and* a discussion starter. There is a lot more to be said than could have been discussed on one Sunday morning, and so the 'Epic' approach is likely to be something we come back to in the future.

2. Summary of facilitators' responses

The following sections summarise the discussions based on the facilitators' notes. (These varied in their level of detail.) The content can inform the next steps for how Fitzroy fosters the discipleship of its members.

2.1 How did people respond to the questions?

The feedback from facilitators, both verbal and written, was generally very positive.

Comments included:

- The groups had plenty to talk about, it didn't seem like any group ran out of things to say (although a couple of groups did move on to an additional question)
- There was some comment that sitting in pews are not the ideal (there were a few stiff limbs by the end) but each groups made it work and hearing each other did not seem to be a major issue
- There was some comment that people would generally be keen to do this again

Example quotes to think about:

'Everyone engaged well. Every person spoke at some stage. Two young people in the group were very articulate with their views and older people very receptive to that. The group enjoyed the experience and want similar style services in the future.'

'Enthusiastic engagement. Everyone offered something to say, and all of their contributions were useful... There was much [that was] positive and few suggestions for improvement of things Fitzroy doesn't do so well.'

'Days like today are really cool because we get the time to talk to different people and share our thoughts in a safe and inclusive space. More events like this with room / time for discussion after the sermon sometimes would be brilliant.'

2.2 What does 'following in the footsteps of Jesus' mean for you?

There was a very wide range of answers to this question. The general themes most often mentioned included:

- Recognition that following Jesus is something ongoing and it changes over the course of people's lives; it is not something static. Different challenges emerge at different stages, whether that is early in life, or parenting, or at

retirement, for example. Connected to this were comments on how struggles and doubts are part of following Jesus

- Being part of a community with others who follow Jesus. This offers the possibility of learning from each other, and being able to encourage, guide and set examples for one another. Connected to this was some comment about how following Jesus was 'relational, and not transactional' – it isn't about rules
- Loving your neighbour. This included comments about peace-making, social justice and welcoming others as well as how this helps us become more like Jesus

Other aspects mentioned included:

- Being open to and experiencing God's love and leading, and how this might challenge us to living differently, perhaps in ways we didn't think of before
- The provision of purpose and meaning in life, as well as hope. Connected to this was some comment on how Jesus gives us security and supports us through giving us opportunities to 'start again' and to be restored
- Paying attention to Scripture and allowing it to shape our lives

Examples of quotes to think about:

'People were recognising that faith - trusting in Jesus, was ongoing, never boring, never static, always changing, growing and developing.'

'It's like your wallpaper, something you don't notice everyday, but you know it's there. [Following Jesus] is a big part of your life but you're not always conscious of it.'

'Orientating to Jesus daily. Monastic tradition: 'I fall, I get up again.'

'I used to view discipleship as a box ticking exercise and following rules - that can lead to failure and now I realise it can be much more. I don't need to have things in neat boxes; I learnt that through Fitzroy.'

'Discipleship is about the moving and following of God where he is at work. Being prepared to move with God, the water is strong, God can shift us into areas, we are rooted but not stuck.'

2.3 How does being part of a faith community help you to follow Jesus?

Again, there was a very wide range of answers, the strongest themes were:

- Being part of a community of faith helps you to both find support and give support to others; faith outside of a community is very difficult. Fitzroy offers encouragement and inspiration, consoling and celebrating
- Fitzroy was generally felt to be good at connecting people, with a wide variety of ways for people to get to know with others

- Home groups were specifically mentioned as key places for deeper conversations and 'being real' with each other
- A key strength in Fitzroy was being a diverse community. There was expression that diversity in belief was very important and this allows people to belong. Honesty and openness were frequently mentioned
- Intergenerational connection also received repeated comment. People valued being part of a 'faith family' where they engaged with others at different stages of life

It is perhaps worth noting the phrasing of the question which mentioned 'faith community'. This might have directed responses towards connection with others, rather than to elements such as teaching or worship (which were mentioned here to some degree) and prayer (which was not mentioned in the facilitators' responses to this question at all). These elements were seen as important, as shown by responses in other sections.

Other aspects mentioned included:

- Worshipping and learning together. Diversity in different types of worship was often mentioned
- Enabling people to be able to serve others in the locality, such as through the community kitchen or other ways of supporting our neighbours
- A faith community offers accountability; people support and encourage each other

Examples of quotes to think about:

'The importance of others being involved in our children's lives having them grow up in a faith family where they are known and loved and disciplined and cherished by the whole church family is so important.'

'Everyone appreciated the variety and diversity of people in Fitzroy and the welcome they have received. They feel at home. Some mentioned the importance of Sunday mornings while others appreciated their home groups.'

'Over the years [Fitzroy] has widened my vision and understanding of the second great commandment, to love your neighbour as yourself.'

'The role of home groups in bonding relationships, supporting each other when 'life' happens and gives an opportunity to study and learn together. Brings church down to a manageable size.'

'Whole group agreed there is good diversity in Fitzroy – not everyone takes the same view on faith, you don't have to conform. We can approach faith with differences and there is a broad spectrum on what it means to follow Jesus.'

'Being part of Fitzroy has been instrumental in bringing me back to church. Before Fitzroy I had become detached and uninterested in church.'

'The church's willingness to embrace different forms of worship, even if it is not your own 'brand' of worship. The community's embrace, enthusiasm and exploration of different areas of worship has something to teach each of us.'

'The space to be present in church, the sermons help to focus and challenge the status quo.'

'Home group is huge in helping foster discipleship, my home group has been amazing, and we journey together in that setting. I don't really get discipleship from church I get it from home group.'

'You need accountability in your discipleship in the form of wise friends and fellow disciples who can help you on the journey. If it wasn't for ... I wouldn't be here today. Especially after Covid, they kept me accountable in my faith, texting me about events, words of encouragement and kept me coming to church.'

'Fitzroy is fantastic at creating an intergenerational space where everyone can mix.'

2.4 How might Fitzroy better help you follow Jesus?

This question had the widest spread of answers and often included responses that might make Fitzroy 'better', though not necessarily in relation to following Jesus. It's a tricky question, however.

Some activity directly helps following Jesus, but other comments perhaps related more to the structures or processes in Fitzroy that might help following Jesus. The responses have been outlined in three sections below.

The main themes were:

- Stemming from the previous question, where home/small groups were seen as important places for connection, there was much comment on how it wasn't clear what home groups existed and how to join one.

There was recognition that joining a home group could be made a lot easier for people new to Fitzroy, as well as consideration for some consultation with people who might want to join one.

There was also some discussion about setting up a home group that met during the daytime for people who didn't like/couldn't to be out at night

- Studying and developing better understanding of the Bible received widespread comment, most notably in two areas.

Firstly, developing understanding of the 'basics' (such as Alpha or Christianity Explored might provide) for young people, young adults, people new to faith or people simply looking to refresh their understanding of their faith. There was comment that Bible Class / Evolve can only go so far, but there is a 'jump'

to the morning service, which was perceived to be more about application of belief. Communicant classes were also requested.

Secondly, studying the Bible in greater depth across the whole community, as has been provided at various times, were appreciated and further requested.

Other themes

- There was some comment on how it could be difficult to offer/volunteer time or skills when it wasn't always clear who is in charge of which group. There was a suggestion that a simple directory could be assembled that outline each group, and who to contact if someone wants to get involved
- Spaces for deeper engagement were recognised, appreciated and requested, this included aspects such as Passion, deeper understanding of the Bible, practising silence or using other creative approaches to worship
- Interaction in general was welcomed and there was some comment that Fitzroy should continue to provide both engagement (like the Epic Sunday approach) and meeting points (such as the community meals, or bread and cheese lunches)
- Approaches to reading and engaging with the Bible might include a community Bible reading scheme
- Prayer might receive more attention, with more opportunities for in-person prayer meetings, as well as online
- Fitzroy is welcoming, but some comments suggested a more focussed look at inclusion, taking into consideration a wide range of needs such as physical disability, intellectual disability, and neurodiversity

Other discussion points:

- Clearer communication received frequent comment, with requests for communication of events and activities to be increased, using various media, with the availability of a long-term calendar (particularly to help with planning activity)
- Kirk Session could communicate more about key decisions taken and the wider direction of the church. Some comments mentioned wanting feedback from the Epic Sunday discussion
- There might be more on offer for young people in their late teens and early twenties (publicised to the many students in the area)

A few quotes to think about:

'To me it seemed that the desire [in the group] was to build more opportunities for connection and teaching / discussion on bible teaching in how that related to roles / life / work. These opportunities should be mixed, [and] intergenerational to include the wealth in the community.'

'With more people in the congregation living with various additional needs, can we be more proactive in providing spaces and places for these people? Let's be aware of the language we use.'

'Someone to coordinate home groups, what exists, leadership for home groups etc. It's hard to know what's available and when they meet and what group to join. Sounds like they are incredible for discipleship and support but if you aren't in one you really seem to miss out.'

'Home groups feel very daunting for those of us who are on the outside and have never been part of one or who were in one but due to circumstances don't go anymore. There needs to be greater awareness, invitation and inclusion.'

'A more open and multi-faceted way of letting the congregation know what is going on needs to be developed so that all feel involved and included.'

'Some indicated that they would like to become more actively involved, but there was a feeling of being somewhat intimidated to volunteer, or not know how to, as they did not know where to go or who was in charge of what activity/group.'

'There is a lack of 'nuts and bolts' teaching – what Jesus says – how to read the Bible etc. Steve is good at application but there is a need for bible teaching / foundational knowledge.'

'The use of internal resources for Sunday morning teaching... to lighten the load on Steve and to give alternative perspective should be encouraged. The evening series were useful but limited numbers were able to access this, and the encouragement to watch on-line is not appropriate for everyone.'

'I really benefit from the variety in the evening services that offers that stretch and gets me out of my comfort zone. I would love more Bible teaching that would allow for that stretch.'

2.5 What went well / been 'better if'...with this approach?

The last three questions didn't receive extensive comment from facilitators, which probably reflects that there wasn't as much to say here as there was in response to the three main questions.

The main comments included:

- General agreement the Epic Sunday approach was right, and it was good to do something different
- The questions were open and allowed for a range of responses
- The discussions had energy; people were keen to interact; it was a break from listening
- The intergenerational mixing was appreciated
- There was some recognition that the conversation was often at 'surface level' because this was a new approach. More practice might deepen this

- The time allocated was generally felt to be the right amount. Some facilitators used a supplementary question in the last few minutes, others felt a little rushed towards the end

Example quotes to think about:

'Following discussions someone suggested that a report or summary of discussion from today should be shared widely with the congregation - copies to be made available or to be placed on our website. Mention was also made about Fitzroy developing a transition plan to cover next few years and plans for the vacancy.'

'There needs to be feedback on how the information gathered is being used. There needs to be obvious / evident action – even if it is [only] a couple of developments as a result. There is a bit of scepticism that it will have been a talking shop with no real influence.'

'I think that it gave the congregation a voice in a more direct and less anecdotal way than usual, and it would be great if we could have this maybe once a year or whenever there seems to be a need.'

'Three questions were enough. It was a challenge to keep the group on track at times, but great for a first event.'

2.6 What might be helpful in the future for events like this?

There was general agreement that an approach like this should happen again. There were no major criticisms about how the Epic Sunday ran, but it is worth remembering that groups spread over two pews were more easily managed than groups spread over three. Group sizes should then be 8-10.

The pews are not ideal for this type of activity, but staying in the church keeps everybody together and reduces the amount of moving around which takes time and can distract people from the intention of the discussion.

Example quotes to think about:

'Make sure that while it is intergenerational there is a good mix of young people and older and that there is a good number of young people in the group – make sure they feel comfortable talking, ensure the adult / older voice isn't dominant.'

'Our group spread over two pews, at first a third pew also engaged but that was too big, not everyone could easily hear each other so it was great when a group started and took the third pew to a new group.'

2.7 Anything else you would like Kirk Session to know?

In a few places, facilitators added some of their own thoughts and perspectives to the questions asked. These have been included in the summary of responses above. There were also a few times facilitators made comment on some of the aspects that were discussed in their group.

These comments include:

'I believe we need to motivate those who see a need which could be developed, to do so themselves rather than expect others already serving to deliver it.'

'If I had one take away, I think that it's that we need to make home groups more accessible, and it would be great if there was some sort of central link up for them starting up in September.'

'We need to work hard to welcome and 'belong' people with disability - physical, educational, neurotypical etc be they adults or children. It will come to us all! Examples - communion support - if people cannot hold the glasses or bread easily. If people do not read easily, might they join a home group? Children who cannot sit or are overwhelmed.'

3. Going Forward

Well, what now? The intention of the Epic Sunday was to create space for sharing and reflection on following Jesus, and how our faith community might assist that more. It was always about connection more than consultation to generate a masterplan! That said, the records of the discussion are important pieces of information that can help shape the next couple of years' activity in Fitzroy, in terms of spiritual formation. Kirk Session will now:

- Reflect on the conversation during and after the Epic Sunday, and the responses summarised in this report
- Think about what is known, and what further information is needed
- Begin to make decisions about action in the short, medium and long term

We are also a church which believes that every member of the community has a ministry – we all have a role to play. The views shared on the Epic Sunday, summarised in this report, are therefore for *everyone* to reflect on, and to think about what comes next. Kirk Session can give direction, but they, like everyone else, are volunteers, and so they will need support to make changes.

As you have read the report, it is likely that certain aspects have sparked your interest more than others. You might then consider what your part could be in relation to how those aspects develop.