

HOLY HABITS FOR MAKING DISCIPLES
Moorabbin-Dandenong Lutheran Church

From a series of sermons
preached by Pastor Greg Pietsch, May – June 2019

1 – DWELLING IN GOD’S WORD

Foundation and Call

- Jesus says, *If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free* (John 8:31).
- He also calls us to *Go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matthew 28: 19-20). This presumes that we *are steeped in his word*.
- With his call, our Lord gives us particular *spiritual disciplines/holy habits* to grow us in Christian maturity and develop us in his mission to all.
- This series presents some of these practices for today – beginning with *Dwelling in God’s Word*.

Dwelling in God’s Word (for two or more people)

1. The leader selects a scripture passage in advance.
2. Stop other thoughts and be quiet. Then pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our listening to his word.
3. Invite people to note what strikes mind or heart as the passage is read, or what questions arise.
4. The passage is read slowly, then again.
5. In pairs, each person shares, without interruption, what struck them.
6. If feasible, each person then tells the group what they heard the *other person* share with them.
7. The group then discusses what God might be up to through the passage, before ending in prayer.

Benefits of Dwelling in God’s Word this way

It moves from self-focus (today’s obsession) to community – which is the nature of the church.

- It engages our minds and hearts more deeply with scripture.
- It develops skills of careful and respectful listening to others, and the sharing of God’s story.
- It overcomes the false privatising of faith.
- Kept up, it transforms communities as they are re-shaped by the word.

2 – ANNOUNCING GOD’S REIGN

The Reign of God

- Jesus came saying, *The kingdom of God is at hand* (Mark 1:15). The New Testament then shows how God’s kingdom comes in Jesus.
- God’s rule can be distinguished in two parts:
 - His reign with his *left hand*, whereby he creates the world in wonderful order, keeps it going by people’s productivity, and develops it by our inventiveness.
 - His reign with his *right hand*, whereby through Jesus and the gospel he saves us from the effects of human sin which opposes his rule.
- Society has rejected these Christian foundations and put *each individual person* on God’s throne instead, with terrible consequences.
- People need the good news of God’s reign, and God calls us to share it, as we’ve received it.

Noticing the reign of God

- To announce the reign of God we first need to *notice it ourselves*.
- This means *bringing it to mind*, being *alert for what God is up to* in everyday life, *interpreting what happens* as God at work, just as Jesus and the whole bible does (eg the Psalms).
- So we don’t see things as happening by *good luck or chance*, but rather by *providence* which is *God’s good will*; and we see trouble as *God teaching us* and calling us to *faith and prayer*.

Announcing the reign of God

- We announce the reign of God when we *ascribe things that happen to their proper place in his reign*, either his work of creating and sustaining the world, or of redeeming it through Jesus.
- It can be as simple as saying, *What a beautiful day God’s given us!* or, *God give you strength to cope with that;* or, *I forgive you and God forgives you too;* or, *I’ll see you tomorrow, God-willing.*
- This holy habit gently rebukes the practical atheism of our age, helps overcome the wrongful privatising of belief, strengthens faith and the family of God, and shares God’s story with others.

3 – DISCERNING GOD’S GUIDANCE

A question: *How do we make decisions, and when we do, how do we find the will of God for them?*

We don’t ‘find the will of God’

- ‘Finding the will of God’ is not something God gives us to do, if by that we mean:
 - God *hides* his will regarding our life, and
 - our job is to somehow *prise this out of God*.
- If God’s will is hidden, then trying to penetrate God’s mind to get to it is really a form of *divination*, which God strictly forbids.
- In the Old Testament God sometimes provided special ways for Israel to obtain his guidance (such as by casting lots), but *Jesus* now bridges the gap between God and us, so nowhere in the New Testament are we told to ask God for a special sign or revelation to show us what to do.

Discerning God’s guidance

- The bible talks more in terms of God’s *way* for us than a fixed will.
 - God specifically commands certain things and prohibits others, showing his righteous way and our damaging sin.

- In between he leaves things open.
- Above all, he gives us Jesus and the way of salvation by faith in him.
- God does *not hide* his way from us – he *reveals* it.
- God also *guides us* into his way by...
 - God's written word – the primary and most authoritative source.
 - Hearts aligned with his – the Holy Spirit's promptings from God's word; never in contradiction to God's word.
 - Wise counsel – from people steeped in God's word and experience.
 - God's providence – God's care of us in everyday life.
 - Common sense – good judgment, subordinated to God's word.
 - Divine intervention – God can break out of this pattern of guidance but it's his prerogative.

4 – SEEKING GOD'S ORPHANS

Foundation

- Our reaction to the idea of *Evangelism* can be guilt, frustration and fear – but the gospel frees us to participate afresh in Jesus' commission to *Go and make disciples of all nations*.
- Jesus defines his mission in Luke 19:10, *The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*.
- God has never abandoned any of his children, but we have abandoned him, orphaning ourselves.
 - So God is always at work in people's lives to draw them back to him.
 - The Lord recruits us into that work, sending us out *with* him to where he is already at work.

Learnings to help us grow in seeking God's orphans

- God usually presents us with one person at a time – to walk with them for months and years – so discerning *who* is an important first step.

- Because every life is unique, seeking the orphans of God is especially personal and relational.
- There are usually progressive stages in people's journey to God, which call for *corresponding help/stepping stones* as we walk with them (→):
 - Apathetic or Agnostic → help by *friendship, acts of genuine kindness*
 - Interested → help by *noticing and speaking of the way God is at work* (announcing his reign)
 - Curious → help by *offering prayer; sharing own confidence, drawing on scripture*
 - Investigative → help by *directing toward appropriate learning and doing this together; praying with them; offering to take to worship*
 - Converting → help by *a pastor giving detailed instruction, receiving by baptism or confirmation; you continuing as a sponsor*
 - Saving faith → help by *supporting with on-going formation in the church*
- A 'person of peace' (Luke 10:4-7) is someone at the stage of Converting. They become the best evangelists for their own community.

5 – COMMITTING TO GOD'S COMMUNITY

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son (1 John 1:3).

Today's context

- The contemporary world puts each individual person on God's throne, idolising the *self*, with great damage as a result:
 - Trying to create one's own life, instead of receiving it as a gracious gift from God, is beyond our capabilities and crushes our spirit.
 - Living for self and one's own freedom damages those who depend on us.

- Real community is replaced by *illusions* of community, with social media soaking up time and attention, betraying us by sale of our data.
- In this context the strong win and the vulnerable lose – and this is considered good!
 - Christian ethics are being lost by rejection of God's word.

Committing to Community

- In rising from the dead, Jesus began a new creation and with it a new people of God, to live in *community* with God and each other.
- Our risen Lord takes us *into* his community and *self-giving commitment* to it.
- The primary place for this is our local congregation, where we:
 - gather to commune with Jesus in his word and sacrament
 - contribute to the needs of our pastor and community with our offerings
 - share our lives with each other, including by our prayers
 - commit to continuing as that particular family of God
 - share the gifts God has given us with those who need them.
- The power for this is not from us but from the Lord, as we wake up to all that he is and does for us, and engage his holy habits for making disciples.

6 – RESPONDING TO CONFLICT GOD'S WAY

This is a vital holy habit for making disciples! See separate series and brochure by Greg Pietsch.

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