

Service Transcript

Sunday January 31st 2021

Service Leader: Ian Battiste

Speaker: Mark Reid

Prayer

Faithful God, we come into your presence with thanksgiving, deeply grateful for the unfailing love and faithfulness that you have shown toward us, it's never changing and always the same yesterday, today and forever and when we call out to you, you answer. When we are exhausted, you give us the strength to go on. When we find ourselves in trouble, you are there, standing beside us. And so, we come before you this morning with gratitude and praise, offering you the worship of our hearts and lives. Open our eyes to see you and your love and open our ears to recognize your voice here among us this morning. In Jesus name A-men

Philippians 2:3-4

In Philippians 2:3-4 it says this: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Paul knew that one of the key factors that contributes to Christian joy and walking in fellowship with the Lord is that as brothers and sisters in Christ we are kind and considerate to others – we also have the love of Christ in our hearts and being one in spirit and like-minded in purpose.

He knew that an unselfish attitude of heart and humbleness of spirit towards our brothers and sisters in Christ was a key to maintaining our joy in the Lord - and so as disciples of Christ we are all called upon to witness and care about the interests of others, above our own. – and at a time when those who live alone or those who are self-isolating now is the time for us to be good disciples of Christ and share his love with our fellow brothers and sisters, neighbours, friends and community and we are encouraged to do this with a gentle humility of heart and to count others interests and needs as more significant than our own – so that our joy may be complete by caring for others just as Jesus instructed us to do - Amen

Call to Worship

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, Worship the Lord with gladness; come into God's presence with singing; Give thanks and bless God's name.

Know that the Lord is God. You have made us and we are yours; we are your people and the sheep of your pasture. You are good; your steadfast love endures forever, and your faithfulness to all generations!

Prayer

Heavenly Father thank you that you are unchanging; thank you that your love for us never fails and your truth stays the same. Thank you that you care so much for us; Lord open our eyes and help us to recognise and respond and care for the needs of others; willingly, cheerfully and with humility of heart and gentleness of spirit - Amen

Poem on Kindness by Deborah Ann

Acts of kindness,
words of hope
we all need them
to help us cope.

Acts of compassion,
words of forgiveness
we should all make
our daily business.

Acts of love,
words of encouragement
helps us through
our own discouragement.

Acts of gentleness,
words of appreciation
seen in our actions
and communication.

Acts of generosity
words of helpfulness
leaves no room
for our own selfishness.

Acts of kindness,
words spoken in deed
we all should give . . .
but, we also need!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for all that we have received in Christ. Thank You for Your love and everything that is brings. Thank You for Your grace and Your compassion and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Help us to be good disciples united together in Christ. Give us humility of heart and transform our minds into the mind of Christ so that we may think the thoughts that you would have us think, so that we may be a channel of Your love to others. Help us to value the needs and concerns of others more than our own and keep us humble in heart. Help us to recognise and respond to the needs or others. willingly, cheerfully and with humility of heart and gentleness of spirit. We ask this in Jesus name, AMEN.

Intercessory Prayers

This week we passed a the grim milestone of 100,000 dead in Britain during the pandemic. Let's lift our land before the Lord. I'm going to use a prayer I saw this week from BelleVue Baptist Church in Southend.

Dear God,
we grieve.
We grieve for those who have died,
we grieve with those who were not able to be present at the end,
we grieve not quite able to comprehend the numbers.
Help us to keep on believing that every life is held in your love,
in your mercy and in your memory.

We pray for healing for those still unwell,
we pray for strength for hospital staff who have been witnesses to so much suffering,
we pray for comfort for those bereaved,
we pray for the efficacy of the vaccine to protect,
we pray for the long night to end and a new dawn to come.
Amen

Today is the BMS national day of prayer, and we have been asked to pray. I'm going to use their own prayer list and there is a copy of it with the Weekly Sheet today. Do take the opportunity to pray more for the BMS this week. As we go through each of the following slides, I'm going to read the contents and then we are going to pray these words together:

Prayers with the Weekly Sheet

Let's just take a short time in quiet to pray for those who need the Lord's help or healing this morning.

Silence

Father, we lift all these people before You this morning. Be with them, be close to them and may Your Spirit move in their lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Sermon – Committed to Learn

Reading: Acts 2:42-47

As we consider how things should unfold as we start to pull out of the pandemic, I'm sure our desire would be to grow into a church that's relevant and vibrant to our local community. But what does a vibrant growing church look like?

We need go no further than the early church for our example. In the book of Acts, we read phrases such as disciples being “added to the church” or the number of disciples “multiplied.” What drove this vigorous growth? Firstly we can point to the way in which the Holy Spirit was poured out, but we can also see that the disciples were passionate, committed to their new-found Saviour – and of course open to be filled and used by the Spirit.

As we look at verses 42 to 47 of chapter 2 we found they committed themselves to five things

Worship – they were committed to God

Fellowship – they were committed to one another

Discipleship - they were committed to learn

Service - they were committed to to serve

Evangelism - they were committed to share Good News

Today we consider discipleship – being committed to learn.

As many of you know, I was a teacher for 14 years before coming into the ministry – but that seems like another lifetime – I finished 22 years ago! One of the things I assume is still taught to training teachers is that the role of a teacher should be to facilitate learning. Not just formal learning in a classroom situation, but a desire to learn new things, to explore beyond their current experience of life. Formal education should just be a kick-start into desiring to learn new things throughout life – at least that’s the idea.

We learn through life’s experience and through wanting to do new things. Some are more enthusiastic than others to explore and adapt. Life should be one long learning experience, as we always face something new in life – unfortunately that also includes the unpleasantly novel, like Coronavirus! And how we have learned in the past year about virology, public health, vaccines and Zoom.

Of course, Lockdown could and should have been an opportunity for all of us to learn something new with so much time on our hands! Many did new things – home exercise, a new thirst for reading, a new hobby. For me it was video production! What new stuff did you learn in the last year?

Life often goes wrong is when we cease to experience new things and our learning experience stops. I’d say that once our desire to learn and explore new things stops, then our will to live will probably stop too. If you think that it’s inevitable as one gets older, then think again. There are plenty of opportunities for formal learning for older people, sometimes called “Third agers” – new languages, natural history, local history. My mother-in-law who’s 99 used to enjoy attending activities by the University of the Third Age before Lockdown came along.

Why do I say all this? Because when we commit ourselves to following Jesus, we becomes

learners of Him – His disciples – because that’s what disciples are – learners. And as I’ve just said, we are learners throughout life in one way or another. We are made man things in Christ as I have reminded you of over the years, but one thing that endures throughout life is that we are disciples – learners of Jesus, and our God is so vast that the more we know, the less we realise we know about Him. There’s so much to know about God and He desires that we learn of Him, to deepen our relationship with Him.

So what can we learn about the nature of discipleship in the very early church?

1. A commitment to learn from God

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

They wanted to know more of Jesus. We’re back to this word “devoted” again. They were committed to learning from the apostles – we now have their teaching in the NT, and of course the OT because they taught that too! But devoting oneself to the apostles’ teaching isn’t just filling your head with knowledge. We engage with God as we look at His written word, the Bible, as the Holy Spirit opens our minds to the truth inside. And that impacts on our work and witness *Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.* Devoting ourselves to studying God means that we become caught up in the ways of God. When we take God’s words seriously, things happen. There is another aspect to “devoted” in relation to discipleship that we need to reflect on. Discipleship has a related root word – discipline. If we want to learn anything new, we need to be disciplined in acquiring and using what God has to say to us through His word. In school we always associated discipline with punishment. Bad move. People who are passionate about something, will quite happily discipline themselves to acquire knowledge and skills and then use them without much prompting. I taught both school-age children and college students. The difference between 16 year olds and 18 or 19 year olds is that the discipline to work comes from them – and how you teach them is more guide than taskmaster! Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with that enthusiasm to know God more deeply, more intimately.

If we love Jesus, then we please Him by being devoted to learning more of Him and that requires discipline as much as enthusiasm, because we will see soon, that discipleship can be costly.

2. A commitment to learn from one another

The second thing we learn from these verses is that the disciples learned with and from one another. *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.* In formal learning I’ve learned different things over the years, some on distance learning, some with others. Every time I’d say that learning with others was so much easier than by myself. In Spurgeons, some of the most interesting things I learned was from other students over breaks and

lunch, sometimes more helpful than the lectures. Actually, that was the idea we learned together through our conversations.

It's the same with the church, we read in this passage that they did so much together. It wasn't just so they could have nice fellowship, they built one another up as disciples by the activities they did together, by the encouragement and experience they brought to each other. Never believe you are so clever that you don't need others to grow in your faith. We learn from one another. Never believe that you are so old and learned that you can't learn from someone else. If you feel there is nothing others can teach you, then you're not as clever as you think.

3. A commitment that is costly

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need

I will look at this more closely at this time, but the disciples' devotion to Christ was in costly service to one another, and others beyond the church. Discipleship is costly. If we are serious about following Jesus it can be costly.

Let's look at a few words Jesus spoke in Luke 14. These are quite tough words from Jesus. There were large crowds of people following Jesus around and he puts to them these words *Luke 14:26-27 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

These are quite tough words. What on earth did Jesus mean? Did he mean actively hate them? No he meant that our love for Him should be so great that the world and all the people in it would seem like hatred. It then gets worse *27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Carry his cross* – what's that about – be prepared to follow Jesus: to make our lives a love sacrifice for Him as much as He made His for us.

We are fortunate in this land that things are easy for us, but as we learnt last week, that's not so for many Christians worldwide. Being a disciple of Christ, a Christian costs in North Korea or Afghanistan, or Somalia, or Northern Nigeria. Let's not forget that and ask the Holy Spirit that as disciples, we may have that assured faith so often we see amongst the persecuted.

4. A commitment that is productive

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

When we are devoted, committed and when we count the cost, then things happen. The

Lord adds to the church all those being saved. Why? We are going to be looking at why committed disciples leads to productive churches in our next session. But as we go through another month, possibly two, let's focus on our discipleship. There are so many opportunities to read, to pray, to look and listen to stuff online. Use this time by spending it with God – and do take every opportunity to learn with others. By a remarkable coincidence, today is the first we advertise this year's Lent Course.. Take advantage of what's there to go deeper into Jesus, that we will follow Him more nearly day by day. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus

Thank you that by your death, and the forgiveness of sins you bought for us on the Cross, we now have new life in You. Thank you that we are disciples, learners of You. Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to desire to know more of Jesus and the discipline to take up our cross and follow Him day by day. Help us to understand the cost involved and be prepared to be the people that we should be in Christ. Father, may we take every advantage of the present time, to know you more dearly.

We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Closing Blessing

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself, the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service; the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Acts 2:42-47

1. Thinking back to your school, college or university, what most motivated you to study and learn. How may this help you learn more about Jesus now?
2. What sorts of opportunities are there in our church to grow and learn with other in the fellowship. What sorts of things would help you in your spiritual growth though being part of the church?
3. Read Luke 14:26-27. Should we take Jesus' words literally? If not, what do they truly mean for us. Why do you think that Christianity is so costly?