

# **St Martins C3 – June 5, 2022**

## ***The Age of Disbelief – Stand Strong***

### **Sermon Notes:**

We live in an age of disbelief in organizations, God, and each other and we need to know how to stand strong amidst it.

Consider how you would respond to someone who said to you: *“God? Why would you believe in God? Only crazy people believe in God. And you go to church? The church is only after what it can get from you.”*

There is a cultural narrative behind the question that we can speak to. To do that (or to explore any cultural issue) we can see it through the framework of the Biblical story: creation, fall, redemption and consummation.

1 - Creation – How were scepticism and doubt in the very beginning?

There was none. God created a good and ordered world. Humans knew Him and they trusted Him and each other.

2 – The Fall - How was it affected by the fall and its curse?

**Read Genesis 3:1; Jeremiah 9:4; John 2:24.**

The serpent speaks doubt and Eve listens and takes the fruit. Instead of a world of trust, we have a broken world that affects our relationships with God, his creation, institutions and each other.

People experience a lot of pain, heartache or broken trust in their own life. Pain builds scepticism which leads to distrust and brings withdrawal and disconnection.

3 – Redemption – when Jesus came how did he reframe this issue?

**Read John 10:24-30; John 20:24-29**

When Jesus came he asked His listeners to walk back to the time when humanity saw God for themselves and knew Him personally. Jesus acknowledged that faith in Him is not easy but that it is something we all must do.

4 - Consummation – what will it look like in the age to come?

**Read Revelation 2:3-4; 7:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Colossians 3:13-15**

On this side of heaven, we may not experience all that we are meant to be, because of the brokenness of human nature. But then we read of the compelling, beautiful picture of the potential of human community united under God and we see the difference the church could be in the world.

The greatest cure to people's doubt about God and their distrust of the church is to be the community we are called to be. Those who work through difficulties and disagreements. Those who care for others and know them fully. This is the vision of Heaven that we can begin to make a reality in our life now.

## Questions for Connect Groups:

### Sermon Reflection:

*What stood out to you from this week's message?*

*"God? Why would you believe in God? Only crazy people believe in God. And you go to church? The church is only after what it gets from you." How would you answer this person?*

*What other cultural issues would you like to take through the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation framework?*

### Life Application:

*What professions do you most trust? What professions do you least trust?*

*What causes you to lose trust in a person or institution?*

*How have you noticed a lack of trust in your world?*

*How easy is it for you to have faith in God? What about the church?*

*What is one thing you can do to invest more into church relationships?*

*To be vulnerable, we need to trust others. How do we build enough trust to be honest with other people?*

*What would it take for St Martins C3 to be a place where those outside the church are attracted to it rather than cynical about it?*

## **Monday Devotion: Combatting Cynicism**

***Read John 13:35; Galatians 6:1-3; Ephesians 4:31-32;***

***Colossians 4:5-6***

We live in an age of disbelief. It is hard for anyone to believe in anything anymore, let alone a God who they cannot see and touch. God has a secret weapon to combat that disbelief.

It is called the Church.

No, really.

A big part of God's plan to draw people to Himself is that they see His reality in the people who are called by His name. We should be the most forgiving, understanding, helpful community that the world has ever seen.

We live in a world that needs relationships that allow people to be broken but don't leave them that way. The Church should be a place of inclusion and care where people are known and loved.

Unfortunately, we have a long way to go to meet that ideal. We often become focused on our programmes and our issues. This week we will consider how we can change that.

### **Pray:**

That God would help us to be the church the world most needs.

## **Tuesday Devotion: The Tent of Belonging**

***Read Revelation 7:13-17***

This passage speaks of those who faithfully followed God and the welcome they will receive from God. Verse fifteen has a beautiful picture of what it means to be part of the age to come. Literally, this verse means God will “spread his tent” over them. Imagine a massive piece of canvas that will be shaped into a tent. He shakes it out so that it falls over all His people, in a way that none of them is outside. It is the most beautiful picture of inclusion. God himself spreads His tent over his people so that all of them are inside.

Where is the place you can say, “This is where I belong”? That feeling is a foretaste of what you will experience in the presence of the Lord.

Some of us struggle to feel at home in this life. Some don’t feel completely at home in their work. Some don’t feel completely at home in the church or their own families. Some don’t feel at home in their own bodies.

Whatever your struggles are in this life, if you are in Christ, the day will come when you know that you are completely at home. When God spreads his tent over you, you’ll say, “This is where I belong! I was made for this place! This is where I was always meant to be!”<sup>1</sup>

### **Pray**

Ask God to show you how you belong in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> From a sermon by Colin Smith.

## **Wednesday Devotion: Overflow to Others**

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:9-10; 2 Corinthians 13:11-14;**

As we sense belonging with God we can then extend that belonging to our relationships with each other. Paul saw fellowship with God as more than a casual relationship but a partnership in the life and ideals of Jesus.

Our relationship with God will then be the benchmark for our relationship with others.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul tells the Corinthians that God has called them into partnership with Jesus. He then appeals for them to be 'perfectly united' in Jesus' name. There is an undeniable link between our inclusion with God and our desire to have a relationship with God's people.

In Paul's final blessing of 2 Corinthians 13, the Corinthians are encouraged to encourage each other and live in harmony in peace. This will mirror the love and peace that God in turn gives to His people. Paul desired the church's love for each other to be as strong as their love of God and the grace of Jesus.

One way to live this out is to get involved with connect groups in the church. As we meet regularly with other believers we experience the love of God and share it with each other.

### **Pray**

Ask God to reveal the partnership he has given you and how this partnership can be extended to other Christians.

## **Thursday Devotion: Relating to Each Other**

**Read Acts 2:42; Galatians 2:8**

Acts 2:42 notes that a hallmark of the early church was their devotion to each other. This fellowship is “a communion of common fate and destiny,” says one writer.

This is seen further in Galatians 2:8 when the apostles discern Paul’s calling, and he is given the right hand of fellowship. Our community at church is more than mere outward friendliness; it implies deep connection.

The unity we have in Jesus is a deepening and expanding quality of life together. It is Jesus’ blood that brings this life and deepens this bond.

The church is envisioned to have a deep relationship with Jesus and, through Him, a unifying partnership with each other. This unity should transcend the differences the church has too often focussed on and drive all Christians to be, through word and action, the people of God.

Today, focus on one way that you can show love to someone distant right now, for example, by encouraging someone in their ministry or inviting someone over for a meal.

### **Pray**

Pray for someone you know is struggling right now and show your support for them from afar.

## **Friday Devotion: Deeper Church Community**

### **Read Philippians 2:1-11**

One writer said, “the local church is ... the obvious place of concretely expressing the love of God.” So the local church should be the ultimate place of sharing with each other through God.

The kind of community that breaks down walls of distrust is expressed through more than friendly conversation after Sunday morning worship – though that is a great place to start. Community is evident through the deeper unity of people invested in what God is doing. It has to do with a shared vision, person, goal, or project in which the members are substantially invested.

Ultimately the church must be more than an insular club but a means for transformation. When people come into a church, they should sense something different about the environment.

When we live out community, it is an expression of the kingdom of God and a witness to the world of the nature of God. As we build relationships we should be looking for ways to move deeper with each other. As we do faith, hope and love can seep from our pores.

### **Pray**

Ask God to help St Martins C3 to be a place of great community.