**St Martins C3 – February 18, 2024**

***Relationship with Others – Discipleship Explored***

**Sermon Notes:**

If you asked the average Christian, what it means to be a disciple, most people would say: “It means having a close relationship with God.”

If me and God are good then my discipleship is sorted. However, discipleship also includes having good relationships with ourselves, with other Christians and with the world we are bringing God’s love to.

***Read Matthew 22:34-40***

The greatest command is to love God, yet the second is equally important to love the people whom God has made.

***Read John 13:34-35***

A special part of being a disciple is the complete relationship that Christians have with each other.

Being a disciple in this area looks like:

1. Meeting together
2. Showing love through warmth, encouragement and forgiveness
3. Serving them with your resources such as spiritual gifts, time and money

Maybe, through that brief exploration, you already see the area you need to grow. But there is another level to our relationship with other Christians. Building discipling relationships with them.

Loving other Christians *is* discipleship. Loving other Christians is also how you grow in discipleship. Finding wholeness in your relationship with others is both an aim of discipleship and a means to helping all other areas of your discipleship.

Those who grow in life have harnessed a superpower. The power of relationships where they can give and receive feedback.

We cannot do faith all on our own. We need other people, someone to come alongside us and help us on our journey.

***Read Proverbs 28:26; Ephesians 4:21***

This requires vulnerability.

We want to encourage you to find those people in your life. Part of that is being involved in a connect group, people you meet with regularly, encourage and serve. And those you can be wisely vulnerable with.

Growth only happens in the right environment. We need to treat other people’s vulnerability with a great deal of care. You need to build a relationship filled with trust and positivity. One that is more filled with encouragement than other feedback. In the environment growth happens.

**Connect Group Material:**

*Key Point:*

*A great relationship with other Christians is an expression of our love for God and aids our discipleship in all other areas.*

*Key Question:*

*What does it look like to have a loving relationship with other Christians and how can we grow in it?*

*Other Questions:*

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

*What does this message tell you about God?*

*What does this message tell you about humans?*

*How important do you think it is to meet with other Christians?*

*Are there times you have been hurt by other Christians? How have you overcome this?*

*If you had someone you knew would respond perfectly to your vulnerability what would you tell them?*

*What person or group in your life would you like to invest in more?*

*What will you do as a result of this message?*

Songs from Today:

Grace is On Our Side, Story to Tell, What Other King, Christ in Me, Surrender All

***Monday Devotion: Love Each Other***

***Read John 13:34-35; Philippians 2:1-4***

We are to be known for the way we love, primarily the way we love each other as Christians. That was the message that Jesus gave His disciples as He washed their feet and went to the cross.

Think about Whittaker’s chocolate for a second. That’s a good second. Other people do chocolate, but there is something about the way Whittaker’s does chocolate that makes them the most trusted name in chocolate in New Zealand. There is a creaminess and richness that is distinctly Whittaker’s.

So it is with Christians. There is to be a distinctiveness to the way that we love that others aspire to replicate.

God’s love is at the centre of life. Therefore, we need to embody this love noticeably. We can live out love through some key actions.

Our school has a value in this term of *Kotahitanga*. This is the Māori word for unity. It is seen when we value each other, support each other and spend time with each other. It is the same concept that Paul mentions in Philippians 2. Consider how to live that out today.

**Pray** and ask God to show you how you can honour other Christians.

***Tuesday Devotion: Love is Surrender***

***Read John 15:12-13; 1 John 4:7-8; 1 John 3:16***

Jesus says that our love needs to be modelled on his love**.** How did Jesus love us? Love is a man hanging on a tree with his heart poured out for you and me. That is what love is! If we do not know how to lay ourselves down for others, then we do not know love.

When I was young and single, I thought I was a nice person. I cared for others; I encouraged them; I listened and gave them my concern. I rated myself pretty high on the love meter. Then I got married and discovered that I was in fact, a very selfish person. I was used to doing life my way, but now I had this whole other person who wanted to do things differently.

I had to put myself second and learn to lay down my desires and seek the good of my wife instead. (I’m still learning how to do that!)

Jesus shows us that the kind of love that God has hard-wired into the Universe is self-sacrificial love. It is the most satisfying and most challenging thing you will ever experience.

As we seek to love other Christians let us reflect on the things we do to serve them. May our attitudes and actions reflect God’s heart for us.

**Pray** and ask for God to show you what it looks like to sacrificially love the people in your life, beginning with your family and moving out to other Christians.

***Wednesday Devotion: Grace and Truth***

**Read John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 8:1; Ephesians 4:15**

Sometimes grace and truth seem to be at odds, but we need both.

Have you ever watched those talent shows where someone stands on a stage and sings or dances or performs and they have no ability? I think: “Why didn’t people tell them they were so bad?!” The judges sure do.

Why are we too scared to be honest with the people in our life? One reason is we are scared of hurting them. But often it is really that we are scared of what they will think of us if we say something that might feel unpleasant for them. “I do not want to be known as someone who hurts others. If I reject them they may reject me.” But we need to tell the truth.

Love without truth is fake, however, truth without love is noise. Love and truth together bring influence. Let’s embody that in the way we do our relationships with each other.

The truth in love. There is a difference between criticism and constructive feedback and we must become experts at expressing the latter when dealing with other Christians.

Grace provides the environment in which truth thrives.

**Bring to God** any situation where you are struggling to share the truth in love and ask for His wisdom.

***Thursday Devotion: Discipling Each Other***

***Read 1 Corinthians 11:1; Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1-5***

It seems arrogant to tell others to be like us. We are nothing special, we are just following Jesus as best as we can. We know we are weak and can see our failures. If it was only about us in human terms, then we would encourage people not to be like us.

In 1 Corinthians 11, however, Paul doesn’t just say, “Imitate me.” He says, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” In other words, it is completely appropriate for us to see where Christ has done work in our lives and invite others to imitate those parts.

Do you have a good identity in Christ? Others should imitate that. Have you overcome a sin area in your life? Others should imitate that. Are you full of joy, have a good knowledge of Scripture or reaching out to the lost? If so, look for ways to invite others in to see how the good God has done in you can be copied.

We need each other. There will be some ways I am stronger and can help you, there are other ways you are stronger, and I will look to you for support.

We need to carry each other’s burdens, and this includes finding the areas where we need extra help and asking the right people for that help.

**Pray** and ask God to reveal what He’s done in you that you can humbly display to others. Ask where others might help you.

***Friday Devotion: Living out Love***

**Read Galatians 6:10; Romans 1:10-12**

Rick Warren says:

*“Why do people in the family of God get special attention?*

*Because whatever you pay attention to is going to grow. If I pay attention to my garden, it’s going to grow. If I pay attention to my kids, they’re going to grow. If I pay attention to my marriage, it’s going to grow. If I pay attention to my work, it’s going to grow.*

*“What is the greatest gift of love? It’s not diamonds, flowers, or chocolate. The greatest gift of love you can give is focused attention. You can affirm people just by looking them in the eye, which essentially tells them, ‘I value you. What you have to say is important to me because you matter to me.’*

*“What people want more than anything else is focused attention. They want to know that their thoughts matter, that their lives matter, that they are valuable.”*

One person I know is very good at prayerfully writing little notes and emails of encouragement to others. They show that she sees the good things in their life and that they matter. She brings joy and growth to others through her kindness.

Think about who you can show value to today by giving them your focused attention. **Pray** about who you can encourage.