

St Martins C3 – September 12, 2021

Bringing out the best – Culture of Encouragement

Sermon Summary:

One of the most life-changing truths we come to appreciate as Christians is our identity as a child of God. It is a revelation that penetrates deep into our hearts, because it reveals who we truly are and what we were born to do.

Read: Ephesians 1:3-5 & Romans 8:14-17

Through what Christ has done, we are now children of God. And with that new identity, comes all the inheritance that goes with that new identity. We are not who others say we are, therefore we are free to be who God has called us to be. We are in God's care, which means that He will never forsake us or let us down. If we belong to the One who has all the power of the universe at His disposal, then there is no evil in this world that can overcome us. If we are God's children, we are now part of an eternal Kingdom that lasts forever. We have certainty as to what will happen in our future and a sure hope to look forward to. Grasping the reality of who we are in Christ provides the foundation for a healthy relationship with God and a means by which God can bless us. It ought to forever change how we think about ourselves.

However, our identity as children of God should not only change the way we think about ourselves, it ought to also change how we think about everyone else around us, especially our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Part of our new identity as children of God is to support and encourage each other in their new creation identity. Therefore, we don't treat them based on the sins of their past, but their God-given future. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: ***“encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”***

If relationships in Christ's Church are based on an honouring of who each person is in Christ, the church and everyone in it will THRIVE. It would be an environment where we bring out the best in each other. After all, Church ought to be a place where who you are is valued, what God is doing in you is encouraged and support is given so you can reach the full potential of who God has called you to be. So, what might that look like in practice?

1) Seek God for the revelation of who you truly are.

It is hard to treat other people as brothers and sisters in Christ, when we haven't yet grasped the truth of us being children of God ourselves. Therefore seek God for a deeper revelation of this.

2) Honour the new identity your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ have.

Paul always refers to those he is writing to as saints, not sinners, because he is always calling them to the new identity they now have. We need to follow Paul's example and honour and think about each other as family members in Christ.

3) Speak it out (Eph 4:29)

Putting this into action not only requires a change in the way we think, but a change in the way we speak to each other and about each other.

We will be fighting against the tall poppy culture in NZ in order to speak in a more positive and encouraging way. The irony in NZ is that we celebrate the Lisa Carrington's or Sophie Pascoe's when they get the Gold Medals, but that isn't the only time they need the encouragement and the honour. They need people to believe in them when they are doing their training. Likewise, if we want everyone around us to reach their full potential in Christ, we need to give specific encouraging words of praise all the time, not just when they achieve a milestone.

Give encouragement a go this week. As you do, you will be building someone else up. Not only that, you will be helping St Martins C3 be a place where people thrive. So, let us continually build a culture of encouragement where we bring out the best in each other.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

What are some significant insights you have gained over the years regarding being a child of God?

What are some examples of encouragement that you have received to pursue your relationship with God at a deeper level?

What could be some examples of things we could say to others in our church family that would build them up?

What would St Martins C3 operating at a higher level of encouragement within our church look like?

Monday's Devotion – Help when we sin.

Galatians 6:1

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

This week we are exploring the various ways that we can encourage each other. One of those times when we need encouragement, is when we sin.

When we sin, the guilt and the shame rushes in and we feel like we are hopeless and maybe feel like we might as well just give in to it more. However, that is not what God wants for us. His heart is to forgive us, set us free from our sin and restore us to a life of holiness. Most of the time we don't need help from others in that process, but sometimes we fall pretty hard and it's harder for us to brush ourselves off and get going again. That is when we need the grace and encouragement from others in the body of Christ to get us back on our feet and walking down God's path for us again.

Notice here that the emphasis is on gentleness and humility. We are not out to judge and condemn, but to show that we understand the struggle and we will walk alongside until they are strong enough to resist those temptations again. Let us be the body of Christ that helps our wounded, rather than shooting our wounded.

Tuesday's Devotion – Courage when we lack it.

2 Timothy 1:5

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

This is one of 2 letters that Paul sends to Timothy. Timothy is a bit overwhelmed by the challenge of leading a church where older members were teaching false doctrine and he had to stand up to them and correct them. Timothy had tried and failed and was now discouraged. Paul writes to Timothy and ENCOURAGES him to man-up and get rid of these false teachers in the church. But even after the first letter Timothy is still discouraged, so Paul tries another tack. Paul reminds Timothy of the call of God on his life. In this verse Paul is encouraging Timothy of his lineage of faith in his family and how that faith now empowers him.

Discouragement happens to all of us. Usually when life doesn't work out the way we expected it to. Sometimes it is really difficult to find in ourselves the resources to bounce back. Especially when we are faced with a new or difficult situation. It is in those times when we need God's courage. We need to know in those times, that this is what God has called and empowered us to do. This is where other people come in. Those close to us can remind us of God's call on our lives, God's faithfulness to us in the past and God's anointing on us to do what He has called us to do in the future. So, who do you know that maybe discouraged today? Maybe they missed out on something they were expecting to get? What could you remind them of that will help infuse Godly courage in them?

Wednesday's Devotion – Help in our calling

2 Timothy 1:6

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

Paul was confident that Timothy was the right man for the job, because Paul had identified the call of God (anointing) on Timothy's life. However, Timothy was not so sure. This is why Paul is offering the encouragement he is giving.

One of the things we can learn from this situation is that others can sometimes see the God-given potential in us better than we can ourselves. If they have some maturity in the things of God, it is wise for us to listen to their encouragement. God is using them to encourage us in our calling. To fan into flame the gifts God has given us.

So, who is your biggest fan? Who is that mature person who can come alongside you and encourage you to step more fully into what God is calling you to do?

If you can't easily identify that person in your life, pray about someone that you could approach, or a few people that you could approach to be your encourager. Give them permission to speak what they see in you as well as to question you in how you are growing into the purposes of God on your life.

We all need encouragers around us because we all get discouraged at times. Having someone identify in us what we don't easily see takes us further than we can go on our own.

Thursday's Devotion – Help with challenges

1 Peter 3:14-15

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

We all face challenges at times. Many of those challenges come in the form of other people who are criticising us or opposing the work of God in our lives.

Peter was addressing this very situation in his epistle. Christians were being persecuted for their faith and were concerned about the potential suffering they were about to face. Peter encourages them to stay true to God and His ways in the midst of these challenges.

Facing difficult situations on our own isn't easy. The challenges go around and around in our minds, causing stress and in most cases a lack of sleep. Many times we just don't feel that we have the resources within ourselves to deal with what is in front of us.

These are the times we need our brothers and sisters in Christ. Actually, a congregation member sent me this scripture last week to encourage me and it was a word in season for me. We need each other, especially in the tough times.

Who do you know who might be going through a tough time?

What words of encouragement could you give them?

Friday's Devotion – Celebrating the wins

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Typically Paul's letters to the early churches were bringing correction or much needed teaching. His letter to the church at Philippi is an exception to the rule. There was nothing going wrong in the church that needed correcting. Paul was simply writing to encourage them to keep up the good work they were already doing.

We need people to celebrate our successes. It helps remind us that we are doing well and are on the right track. We might think that the success is a reward in itself, which it is, but when others also recognise it, their encouragement helps us keep going.

Celebrating each other's successes is an important part of building a culture of encouragement in St Martins C3. Let's be the carer to other's when they are struggling, the supporter of other's when they are facing challenges and the cheerleader for those who are doing well. A culture of encouragement benefitted Paul and the church at Philippi and it will benefit us too.