**St Matins C3 – February 19, 2023**

**Grow Together – Care and Growth**

**Sermon Summary:**

Jesus said that His purpose in coming into the world was to bring God’s abundant life to us. What Jesus achieved in His death and resurrection for us, was freedom from sin and access to God’s Life. This gospel is the Good News the world needs to hear. It is also the gospel that has changed many of our lives. It is through this salvation that we have a relationship with Christ. It is through this relationship with Christ, where we join a supportive church family who help us grow in our relationship with Christ. As we looked at last week, we need to “*consider how we may spur one another on.”* (Heb 10:24)

The vision and value we feel led by God to highlight as a church this year is this: We desire to see every member of St Martins C3 committed to discipling relationships where they invest in others and others invest in them, to grow closer to Christ, live a Christian lifestyle and fulfil their mission to the world.

**Read: Colossians 2:20-3:16**

Paul is addressing here HOW we are to care for each other and grow in our faith together. Let’s look at the main points he makes in this passage:

1. **Christ has changed who you are on the inside, so let that be reflected in your lifestyle.**

Following Christ, primarily means that we turn from living our way or the world’s way and we live God’s way. That means our thinking, values, priorities and behaviours are centred on Christ and His ways. Other Christians ought to be helpful models to us of what that looks like.

1. **Because Christ is now leading every area of your life, don’t return to the sin that you used to do.**

Let us help each other eliminate sin in our lives and stand our ground against our enemy, who is seeking to rob Christ’s life from us.

1. **We are all mutually responsible to create an environment of spiritual growth in the church.**

In regard to discipleship, there is no need for hierarchy in Christ’s Church. We are all to take responsibility to help each other out. We need to not seek to control others, but to serve them in love.

1. **LOVE one another – CARE for each other.**

If our growing together doesn’t come from a place where it is Christ-centred and motivated by love, then don’t bring it. Our love and care for each other is the foundation on which we grow.

1. **There is a place for us to TEACH and ADMONISH each other.**

We have a lot to learn from each other. So in an atmosphere of love, we appropriately teach each other and hold each other accountable.

Let us commit to each other’s care AND spiritual growth. Practice asking some spiritual growth questions this week.

**Questions to ponder and discuss:**

*Why might we find it easier to ask “care” questions, rather than “growth” questions?*

With someone else or as a group try out some of these questions:

*What has been a scripture or insight that God has given you lately that has challenged you?*

*What is God speaking to you about at the moment?*

*What would going deeper in your relationship with God look like for you this year?*

*What might be some other “growth” questions that you could use to open a conversation about personal spiritual growth?*

**Monday’s Devotion – First priority**

*“Love one another.”* – Jesus (John 13:34)

This may sound familiar but let us not assume too quickly that we fulfill this command of Jesus.

The “one another” Jesus is referring to here is those around us who also follow Christ. This is Christ’s top priority in us building community together. We are to not just tolerate each other, but also love each other as Christ loved us. Basically, that means we are to seek the best for each other. *Are you genuinely wanting what is best for others in the church and doing your best to help them be all God has called them to be?* I appreciate many of you are, which is why God is building a healthy body at St Martins C3.

Why we start with love as the priority in growing together, is that love forms the foundation in a discipling relationship that Christ can build on. If you are not convinced that the person helping really cares about you, then you are unlikely to listen to them. You are also very unlikely to trust them. However, if you know that the person cares about you as a person. If you know that they care about you enough to want to see you grow, then, you will trust them. You will open your life up to them.

As we develop mutual discipling relationships around our lives, let us keep in mind that love comes first. Love is the foundation of it all. We trust Christ because He loves us. Let us then share that love with others, so that we may grow together.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Pray for each other**

**Colossians 4:2**

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

Prayer brings God into our lives. So, when you pray for someone, it makes a difference. It is one of the ways that we show our care for each other and spur one another on in our relationship with Christ

The context of this passage is Paul asking the church at Colossae to pray for him. Have a think about that for a moment. Paul is probably one of the greatest church leaders of all time. A significant contributor to the New Testament. A pillar of the early church. This man of God is asking for prayer! Well, if Paul needed others praying for Him, I am sure we need other’s praying for us.

When we are praying for others, we are not just wishing or hoping that someone else does well. Prayer is listening to God for the other person. Then, as God guides you, agreeing with God’s purposes over their lives. It is establishing God’s goodness in the spiritual realm over their lives and breaking off anything that is not of God and opposing God’s purposes.

Prayer is powerful. Much of its affects we may never see but what will change is our commitment to the person we are praying for and a release of God’s purposes over their lives. So, let us pray for each other, as we encourages one another in our following of Christ together.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Don’t sweat the small stuff**

**Romans 14:1** (Message paraphrase)

*Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. And don’t jump all over them every time they do or say something you don’t agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.*

You may have noticed that us Christians don’t agree on everything. We have various opinions on how we interpret what God has revealed to us and how we ought to live our lives before Him. Paul was well aware of this, so in this and a few other passages he addresses this very issue.

Why do differing opinions have to be addressed? Because they are not supposed to be a barrier to us connecting and growing in our faith together. The devil will try and distract us with side issues that don’t really matter. We need to keep in mind, our enemy is out to distract, divide and conquer. Let us not give him a foothold.

If Paul was teaching on this topic today, I think he would say, “don’t sweat the small stuff.” Another words, keep the main thing the main thing. If we stay centred on Christ and His gospel and mission, we won’t go too far wrong. On the minor things diversity, on the major things, unity.

**Thursday’s Devotion – Restoration**

**Matthew 18:15**

*If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.*

Not only do Christians disagree with each other, they sometimes hurt each other. We do damage, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not. This can cause a rift in the relationship and stifle any growth opportunities. Because of this, Jesus encourages us to go and put it right. Restore the relationship.

Notice what is absent in this passage. We are not to ignore the issue and hope that it goes away. We are not meant to distant ourselves from the person who has offended us. We are not meant to whinge and complain about them to everyone else. All options, that we are very tempted to do.

God’s way, is that we seek to sort it out, one-on-one with the other person. This assumes respect and love for the other person. The other underlying premise in Jesus’ teaching here is God’s way is the way of redemption. We are to take responsibility to do what we can to restore the person, the relationship and Christian community. If necessary, recruit others to help you, if the one-on-one approach doesn’t work. Basically, do whatever you can, but do it the right way, with the right motive.

Do we need to address sin and offences in the church? Absolutely. However, it has to be done with love and respect, always seeking restoration, not condemnation.

**Friday’s Devotion – Kia Kaha**

**1 Peter 5:8-9**

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

We need to keep in mind that we are in a battle. It is a spiritual battle, and we are on God’s winning side. However, the battle still needs to be fought. That requires us to stay strong. We need to stand in God’s strength against our enemy. We need to stay strong together.

There are many pressures on the Christian Church at the moment. We certainly are not the flavour of the month in 2023. This can be challenging for us. We are tempted to think conversations with those exploring faith would be a lot easier if the church had a positive profile in New Zealand. However, Peter’s encouragement here, is that this gives us an opportunity to stay strong in our faith together.

As we face values and beliefs shifting in western society, we need each other to stand strong together in our faith. We need each other’s wisdom on how we respond to topical issues. We need each other’s encouragement to make the most of opportunities we get to share our faith and our hope with others. We need each other to be a united voice against that which needs to be opposed and affirm that which is of Christ and His Kingdom.