**St Martins C3 – June 19, 2022**

**Sharing your faith – Important conversations**

**Sermon Summary:**

The Bible makes it very clear that God wants everyone on planet earth to know Him personally. Because Christians know how important this message of salvation is, we willingly share it with anyone who is willing to listen. Also, because it is so important, we want to do it well.

Although we are focused in this series on the conversations we have when sharing our faith, there are other important things that need to be happening at the same time:

1. We need to appreciate that we are partnering with God. We are working in with what God is doing. It’s not about our agenda. Therefore, we don’t have to take the “pushy salesman” approach, but rather the “helpful friend” approach.
2. Prayer and listening to God has to be underpinning every conversation we have about Jesus.
3. Your personality and personal experience will shape how you approach those conversations.

**The first step is usually an exploration question:**

 E.g – *“Are you a church person?”*

How someone answers that question, will help you see where they are at on their journey towards faith. Either:

* *“I don’t need God” “I might need God” “I need God”*

If, they are in the “I don’t need God,” zone, there is likely to be many conversations before they are going to choose to follow Jesus.

**Example: John 18:33-38**

Pilate was not that interested in hearing the gospel. Jesus doesn’t try and convert him. He simply uses the opportunity to have a conversation.

**When the person you are talking with is in the, *“I don’t need God”* zone, try the *“Have you considered”* question.**

The idea here is to pose the question in a very, hypothetical, open-minded way. There could be many topics you could cover like:

1. Hope in this world and the next.
2. Life’s purpose.
3. What happens after we die?
4. Was Jesus who He said He was?

You don’t have to know all the answers. It is just a hypothetical conversation to help them think. (Maybe practice these sorts of conversations with other Christians first, if that helps). You may try and finish the conversation with *“maybe the possibility that God exists is worth exploring.”*

**If they are in the, *“I might need God”* zone, try the *“What if?”* question**. You will know whether someone is more open, if they are willing to stay on topic and not avoid the conversation.

**Example: Matthew 19: 16-22**

Notice how the conversation starts with the hypothetical but moves to the personal. So, Jesus describes what it would look like for this young man to go on the journey. Likewise, we need to describe what trusting in Jesus will look like for those exploring faith. We will be tailoring the conversation for where the needs are in their lives, so a good question, if you have the opportunity, is: *“What would change if you put your trust in Christ?”* Even if they don’t put their faith in Christ at this point, encourage them to reach out in faith to God.

**What God is looking for from us, is our willingness to prayerfully look for opportunities and be prepared to have the conversations.**

**Connect Group Resource:**

*Connect Groups will be using the Life Shared material from Alpha during this series. Your Connect Group leader will share these resources with you at your next gathering.*

**Monday’s Devotion – Judging the religious**

**John 9:40-41**

*Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”**Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.*

We usually think of Jesus as a meek and mild person. Well, that wasn’t always the case. Jesus had some very harsh words to say to religious people who thought they had it all together, but their pride was blinding them from seeing their need for repentance. So, should we judge people like Jesus did, to help them come to repentance?

An important principle to keep in mind is that as soon as we judge others, we are bringing that same judgement on ourselves. (Matt 7:1-2) So, we have to be prepared to be under the same scrutiny that we are using on others. That is why an attitude of grace ought to underpin all our conversations.

Assuming that you are coming from a place of grace and have extended grace to them, pointing out their sin may be the only way for them to move forward, because their self-righteousness is blinding them. It is important to note here that we only see Jesus do this with religiously proud people, not someone who is unaware of God’s ways. The issue is that religious people ought to know better, so they are effectively bringing judgement down on themselves. Religiously arrogant people are some of the hardest people to reach. May God give us His grace and wisdom as we reach out to them.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Grace for the humble sinner**

**Luke 5:31**

*Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”**Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*

Our knowledge doesn’t bring us closer to Jesus, our humility does. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6) As we saw yesterday, our pride blinds us from seeing our need for God, whereas our humility opens our heart to God and His ways.

When having conversations with others about following Jesus, look for glimpses of humility. Levi, (or Matthew) was obviously well off and well connected, but Jesus saw that Matthew was searching for something he couldn’t find in this world, so Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him. Jesus willingly talks with Matthew’s friends, because they might be humble enough to see their need for God as well.

With an increasing emphasis in our society on keeping it real and being ok with not having it all together, there could be an emerging humility that might give us opportunities to reveal to the humble that there is another way.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Sin no more**

**John 8:9-11**

*At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.* *Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”* *“No one, sir,” she said. Then neither do I condemn you,”* *Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

This passage is a good example of what we have been looking at over the last few days. Jesus judges the Pharisees who are proud, but shows extraordinary grace to the woman who is sinful, but humble.

Humility will lead us to repentance, but we still need to repent and turn away from our life of sin. Our sin will lead us away from God, not towards God. Therefore, we need to rid our lives of any sin.

When helping people discover the forgiveness and freedom found in Christ, I get them to pray a prayer of repentance in their own words. I don’t pray the prayer for them. This may feel a bit awkward for them, and they might be a little hesitant, but when they do the praying, they take the personal responsibility and experience the corresponding freedom that God has for them.

Let us always remember to extend grace to the humble and do all we can to help them on their journey towards freedom.

**Thursday’s Devotion – It’s a whole of life deal**

**Matthew 16:24-25**

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”*

The audience on this occasion is not religious leaders or humble sinners, it’s the disciples. Like the disciples, we may not fully appreciate the whole journey at the starting line, but as we run the race, we need to appreciate that anything we are holding on to in this life is hindering us from taking hold of God’s life.

Notice that Jesus is just laying it all out clearly and not pulling any punches here. Jesus is pressing the point home, that His Kingdom is worth making whatever sacrifice is necessary to attain. We have to appreciate it’s values, so we will be willing to make the sacrifice.

There have been times where I so want someone to go on the journey of faith that I try and find a way to make it easier for them, but then God reminds me that, that is not what Jesus did. Jesus called for a whole of life commitment. If I (or we) present the gospel as anything less than that, we are not being honest.

If it was good enough for Jesus to ask for a whole of life commitment, then we ought to do the same. Is surrendering our whole lives to Christ hard? Yes, it is. But, it’s worth it!

**Friday’s Devotion – The Invitation**

**John 4:28-30**

*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,**“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

Never underestimate the power of an invitation. In this situation, the woman at the well didn’t know that much about following Jesus yet, but she was already inviting other people to go on the journey with her. As it transpires, many people in the region end up putting their faith in Christ.

The great thing about an invitation is that it puts out a challenge to respond, but in a non-confrontational way. It challenges the person to make a choice. Will they accept or turn down what is being offered?

There comes a point in sharing our faith with others, where we need to shift the responsibility on to the person to respond in some way. Keep in mind when you do this, to invite them, but not pressure them. Be clear, but not demanding.

At some point everyone needs to be presented with the choice of whether they follow Christ or not. As Christians we are called to extend the invitation, how people respond is their responsibility. The main thing is that we extend the invitation, whether that be an invitation to explore the journey or make a whole life commitment. May we simply be the invitation extenders.