

# St Martins C3 – June 30, 2024

## Common Ground

### **Sermon Summary:**

The culture around us points towards God and how we can show people the God for whom they are longing.

### **Biblical Principle: Acts 17**

As Paul went on his missionary journeys he came to Athens where people believed in many gods and had little concept that a Jewish messiah was significant for them.

### **Read Acts 17:16-33; Romans 1:20**

Paul begins with their beliefs not his own but shows how what they believe finds its fulfilment in Christ. Paul had not compromised his message and had been guided by the Spirit's freedom and flexibility to communicate in a way that would have the greatest chance of receptivity.

Paul establishes the common ground but shows that their understanding of gods was their way of looking for the one true God. We seek to do the same thing: see what is happening in the people around us that might point them towards God.

### **Example One: National Holiday**

Today is Matariki. Christians wonder whether they can celebrate a holiday where sometimes the stars are seen as gods and worshipped.

God is the creator of the stars of Matariki. We do not in any way deify or worship the stars, but we can see this as an opportunity to worship the God who made the stars.

### **Read Psalm 19:1-4**

I believe we as Christians can prayerfully remember the past, thank God for the future and appreciate the Māori culture that makes up part of our culture, whilst still pointing people to a greater reality.

### **Example Two: Historical Example**

Tarore was a young Māori Christian who was murdered in 1836. Through the influence of the gospel, her murderer and father reconciled. They found that true utu was possible without bloodshed because of the grace of Jesus. Forgiveness achieved the harmony that Utu wanted but could never achieve.

### **Example Three: Contemporary Culture**

Many things in our culture today point towards God. These things that our culture chases after are like the idol to the Unknown God. People are seeking God, they just don't know they are seeking God. When people start talking about these things in their life we can point them to the one who is the fulfilment of these things.

Let's submit our desires to Christ and ask Him to be Lord. Then let us spend time really getting to know what is going on under the surface and pointing others to the God who elevates and fulfils all of our cultural values and practices.

## **Connect Group Material:**

### **Key Point**

Christianity elevates and fulfils cultural values and practices.  
We can show others how God can meet their deepest needs.

### **Questions**

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

What does this message tell you about God and humans?

There is a feeling that more people are hungry to know God than ever before. Why might this be?

Read Acts 17:16-33. What stands out to you about Paul's approach?

What are your thoughts on how to celebrate Matariki from a Christian perspective?

What key desires do you have that you see that God can elevate and fulfil?

How would you begin talking to another person about God being the fulfilment of their desires?

How do you see God revealing Himself to those around you right now?

Spend some time praying for those in your life who need to know God's love.

## **Monday Devotion: Success**

***Read Mark 10:42-45***

This week we are going to look at some of our key cultural desires and see how the gospel elevates and fulfills them.

Not every cultural festival or desire is from God, many of them have been so deformed by sin and anti-God thinking that their fulfillment may look very different from God's original design.

Success is completely different in God's eyes than it is in our eyes. Our definition of success has been clouded by the sinful desire to get as much as we can for ourselves.

It is a "you've-only-got-a-few-years-to-get-what-you-can" culture that runs completely contrary to the gospel. It is a completely earth-bound mindset devoted to building up status in this life and the eyes of people.

The gospel calls us to be people who see success as helping as many people as we can. We desire to be those who serve the world, not those who serve our ego.

We can model this way of living to others and show them that true satisfaction is found in seeking the good of others - even if they never know our name.

## **Tuesday Devotion: Relationship**

**Read 1 John 4:7-8**

My primary school was called Nelson Christian Academy and the person who often took my chapel classes was one of our former Pastors named John Cadigan. John used to come with his guitar and sing songs to us, including a song to this passage.

It was a great song with moments for the boys to sing low and girls to sing harmoniously. It was also ridiculously catchy and has ensured that I have never forgotten these verses.

However, inside these verses is more than a catchy song or nice-sounding idea. Here are some of the greatest truths we will ever hear.

Love comes from God. To neglect love is to neglect God.

We live in a world obsessed with love. Or should I say a world obsessed with its definition of love? Really, it is often bad love. Love by human definition, which is a pale imitation of the love that God holds out for humanity.

As we talk with those who don't know God, we may find they express dismay over a relationship breakdown or how they can't find the right person or tell us about their sexual explorations. These admissions are opportunities for us to gently help them see that what they need is real love. We can then point them to the only one who can give it to them - the one who created them with the need in the first place.

## **Wednesday Devotion: Freedom**

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Peter 2:16**

Freedom is a major cultural value in New Zealand. It is even a line in our national anthem “God defend our free land.” We have embraced a society that gives us a plethora of choices and opportunities.

It is easy to believe that the freedom we have created is a Christian value. Freedom is consistent with the Bible, however, our definition of freedom has its limits.

Many define freedom as autonomy or doing what you feel like without any constraints. This is not Biblical freedom.

We need to encourage those around us that freedom is more than getting what we want all of the time. In fact, for us to find a life of meaning we have to give up part of our freedom. For example, when we get married we give up many freedoms in order to have the community and meaning that is found in that close relationship.

Dr. Art Lindsley says, *“We are truly free when we know the truth about ourselves and the world. This means throwing off the lies and deceptions to which we are so often captive.”*

Deeply held freedom involves giving ourselves fully to Christ and letting Him and His truth lead our lives. Let's point people towards the one whose freedom is greater than mere self-determination.

## **Thursday Devotion: Spirituality**

***Read Romans 8:14***

At times it may seem like the materialistic point of view is the majority. Numerous media sources, journalists and commentators advocate that life is just about the physical reality we see. Yet, research shows that over 80% of the world believes in some form of spiritual reality.

This means that we are walking alongside people with a variety of spiritual beliefs. Some are well defined with people readily identifying as Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or even Māori spirituality. Others are less well-defined. In 2011, 30% agreed with the statement, “I don’t follow a religion, but am a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural.”

I met a person recently, who told me they were not a Christian, but they prayed to “The Source” daily. What I wish I said to them was, “Me too! And I know His name, it is Jesus. In Him, we live and move and have our being.”

This week, as you encounter people facing the issues of life, why not ask them where they go when things get hard? You might find that they have some form of connection with something spiritual.

Then you can talk about the great Spirit who helps us connect with a spiritual reality by making us His children. He is the one that we are searching for and the one that connects us to all spiritual reality.

## **Friday Devotion: Sound Mental Health**

**Romans 3:23; 2 Timothy 1:7**

I want to maintain good mental health. I want to think right about the world and my place in it and be able to cope with all it throws at me. I think that is one of the highest cultural values we have.

Yet, even though it has become an important focus in our world over the last few years we are still struggling to find that place of mental wellness. The reason for this is that we don't acknowledge that our mental health deficits are often a result of sin.

We have fallen short of God's glorious standard and gone our own way. We have tried to live without Him and it has not gone well for us.

I find even in my own life, the days I struggle the most are the ones where I forget to submit myself to God the way I should. I become ruled by others' expectations and my sinful desire to prove myself.

The Biblical answer is faith. As we choose to depend on God we can access the power, love and sound mind that he promises us. This alongside the fantastic understanding our study into the mind has given us, means that you and me can walk in soundness of mind. This is what God wants for our whole world.