**St Martins C3 – September 11, 2022**

**Relate – Empower, don’t rescue**

**Sermon Summary:**

Jesus had some very specific things to say about how we are to relate well. They are not easy instructions to apply to our lives, but God assures us that He will help us, and when applied, we will discover that life will be better for ourselves and those we relate to. These instructions are recorded in Matthew 18, which we will explore over the next couple of weeks.

**Matthew 18:15-17**

***15****‘If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.****16****But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”* ***17****If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.’*

Jesus discouraged us from pointing out the sin in other people’s lives. (Matt 7:3-5) It is better to focus our attention on our issues first. Therefore, the first point today is: **Take a hard look at yourself first.** *Why am I reacting emotionally to what they did or said? Why is this a big deal to me?* Be slow to blame and quick to own your zone and learn something more about yourself.

The next point is that, **hurt happens in relationships.** We live in a fallen world where we hurt each other. Jesus observes this, hence He puts some teaching in place, so that we work through the issues well.

Next Jesus tells us to, **go and talk to the person who has offended you.** That sounds straight forward, but we reach for many other easier options first, like avoidance or gossip. We may even be tempted to enlist the help of someone else to go and have the conversation on our behalf, or we may be the one trying to rescue a victim. However, be careful here. **Don’t do for others what they ought to be doing for themselves.** You stepping in where you shouldn’t doesn’t help them grow and doesn’t restore the broken relationship. **If you are the one offended, then you be the one that initiates sorting it out.**

In our relationships we often take on the role of a persecutor, victim, or rescuer. Sometimes we move from one of these roles to the other, depending on the situation. What Jesus was revealing is that none of these roles are helpful. If you are tempted to play the victim, take some initiative. You are not helpless. If you are tempted to play the persecutor, take a hard look at yourself. Why do you have to control the situation and others in it? Own your own issues. If you are tempted to play the rescuer, why do you have to be the hero? Why not empower the victim, rather than rescue the victim?

Finally, Jesus acknowledges that some people won’t listen, and the relationship is unlikely to be restored. In these situations, take someone who is not emotionally involved and wise with you to try and resolve the matter. After doing all that, if there is still an unwillingness to resolve things, simply be gracious, but cautious. It is possible to keep working together and relating well, while at the same time being cautious in how much we trust the other person.

We will need God’s empowerment and the empowerment of others in these situations, but restoring relationships is important.

**Questions to ponder and discuss:**

*Why are we so quick to blame other people for the hurt that we feel, rather than addressing the potential issues in our own lives?*

*What other options do we reach for rather than going to the person who hurt us and having the courageous conversation?*

*Why is it important to try and resolve the issue one-on-one first?*

*Which role are you tempted to play in your interactions with others, the persecutor, the victim, or the rescuer?*

*What might it look like for you to give up the role that you have been playing and do what Jesus is instructing us to do here?*

*How have you handled a situation where the relationship could not be restored?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Gently help others**

**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.*

This week we are going to unpack this important relational passage in Galatians 6:1-5. In this first sentence we have the instruction to gently help those who overcome by sin.

The Greek word that Paul uses for sin here is, *paraptoma*. The meaning of this word is not an intentional long-term sin, but a sin by neglect or a lack of diligence. It is the same word for slipping and falling on an icy road. The implication here, is that just as you would carefully help someone who has fallen on ice, we ought to be willing to help those around us who slip into sin. It is not our place to stand back in judgement, but to reach out and help.

The emphasis in this verse is not on the person who sins, but the person helping. The person helping needs to do so with gentleness and humility. Why? Because the person probably feels bad enough about what they have done already, so they are vulnerable. We ought to treat that vulnerability with respect, care and love.

The goal is to help them up. Therefore, let us do all we can to identify with those around us who are “slipping” and gently help them back on the right path.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Watch your step**

**Galatians 6:1**

*And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.*

I like how Paul is describing something from a very practical pastoral perspective. This isn’t just a theoretical idea. This is what Paul has observed happens in the church. We trying helping someone out of the mud and end up getting stuck in it ourselves.

Why is it so easy for us to fall into a similar temptation to the one we are trying to help someone out of?

1. Sin is powerful.

We need to keep in mind that sin isn’t this neutral thing that is just one option among many. Sin is powerful and personal. Satan is seeking to trip us up and will use every opportunity to do so. Sin or Satan isn’t just an option to avoid, he is an enemy to be weary of, that needs to be defeated.

1. The allure of sin is exposed.

Many times, we don’t even give sin a passing thought. However, when we are helping someone else who is trapped, they will describe to us how they were sucked into the deceit. It is like looking at something that is alluring, but bad. We may know it is bad, but it is hard to turn our attention away.

Therefore, Paul pre-empts all this with a warning. Don’t underestimate the power of sin. In helping others, be aware that you will be tempted as well.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Burdens not baggage**

**Galatians 6:2**

*Share each other’s burdens.*

At first glance, this seems to contradict what Jesus taught in Matthew 18, and what we looked at on Sunday. However, this is why we always need to interpret scripture in the context of all the other scriptures. Paul is not saying here that we should whinge and complain to each other about everything. Rather he is acknowledging that life is difficult, and this includes fending off sin. In that struggle, we ought to help each other out.

One way we could describe this in today’s language could be, carry each other’s burdens, but don’t carry each other’s baggage. We need to have the humility and vulnerability to acknowledge that we can’t do life on our own. We do get burdened by the trials and worries of living in a modern world. These are burdens which we ought to quite rightly share with others and expect some empathy from them on. Baggage on the other hand, could offences that we have internalised or lies that we have believed about ourselves. For these things, we don’t so much need empathy from others, we need to be challenged to deal with them.

We need to find the appropriate balance of not being indifferent to the needs of others, but neither becoming so enmeshed in their issues that we become burdened by them. Biblical balance is empowering empathy. That is where we identify with the person we are supporting as much as we can, while also gently suggesting how they could help themselves.

**Thursday’s Devotion – Love above all else**

**Galatians 6:2**

*and in this way obey the law of Christ.*

What does Paul mean here, when he says that in doing this, we will obey the law of Christ?

Paul is crystal clear in his theology around living the Christian life. It is not lived by trying harder, rather it flows naturally from a life lived in right relationship with Christ. Because we are now children of God. Because we have now been made righteous. Because we now have the Spirit of God living in us, we are internally empowered to live for righteousness, not for sin. Our obligations are not to sin, our obligations are to live in obedience to Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The law of Christ then, is not a new rule book we need to follow, but a new way of living in relationship with God and within that relationship obeying His promptings and direction.

The result of living this life will be the fruit of the Spirit, which he describes in a few verses earlier. It is a life of loving others. A life of peace, gentleness and patience. When asked to explain which laws we were to follow, Jesus didn’t give us a list, he gave us a catch-all way of approaching relationships around our lives: “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” (Matt 22:39) That is the law of Christ.

**Friday’s Devotion - Don’t get a big head**

**Galatians 6:3**

*If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.*

I love how blunt Paul is here. We may be tempted to think that all this helping each other out is for the weak rather than the strong. We may arrogantly think that we are above falling into temptation and that others ought to just harden up and sort themselves out. Well, Paul has some pretty strong words for those sort of people. You guys are not as tough as you think you are.

If we think we are too busy to help others out, or we are above doing that sort of thing, who do we think we are? The very sin we think we are avoiding is the very sin we are falling into. We are all in this struggle together. We are all on the journey and need each other’s help on that journey.

Not only would we be arrogant, if we took this sort of approach, we would also need to humbly reconsider our life priorities. Sure, there are times when projects take priority because deadlines have to be met, but this ought to be the exception to the rule. In the normal course of life, people come before projects. Caring for others needs to be high on our agenda. Because it is in our love for others that people see Christ.

So, let us take the time and carry each other’s burdens (not their baggage) and restore them gently, being careful to not slip into sin ourselves.