**St Martins C3 – February 5, 2023**

**Grow Together – Discipleship God’s way**

**Sermon Summary:**

It is easy for us to think about our spiritual growth journey as something that only happens between us and God. However, Christ makes it very clear that we can’t become all that He has called us to be without the input of our church family. We will fulfill God’s call on our lives as we intentionally engage in life-giving conversations about faith together.

When Jesus called His first disciples, He called them into a discipling community. The whole ministry of Jesus was devoted to the preparation and the launching of a new community that would partner with Him in extending His Kingdom. The Church Christ established was intended to be a community of people growing in their faith together as they shared their lives in God with each other and with those God had called them to witness to.

**Read: John 17:20-23**

Early followers of Christ adopted this core value and vision and sought to live it out in the way they related to God and each other.

**Read: Ephesians 4:1-16**

1. **The growth that Christ is looking for in His Church is every member coming to full maturity in Christ.**
2. **Christian maturity requires love, humility and unity between church members**

This will feel a bit counter-cultural for us, but it is vital that we are willing to listen and learn from each other. This requires humility and trust. It may not be easy, but it’s worth it for the sake of our spiritual growth.

1. **Christian maturity involves encouraging each other towards a deep devotion to God. (verse 13)**

Intentional conversations with others in our church family about what our next step in growing closer to Christ looks like.

1. **Christian maturity involves using what God has gifted us with to help others grow, as well as willingly receiving what they have to offer us, so that we also grow. (verse 12)**

Every Christian has received knowledge and gifts from God that will help those around them fulfil the ministry and mission opportunities that God wants them to step into.

We are going to be very intentional about creating environments where discipleship conversations and relationships are an important part of life in our church family at St Martins C3 this year and in the future. How we are seeking to do that will be outlined in coming weeks. For now we are focussing on why we are embarking on this journey.

1. It’s God’s way of bringing His people to full maturity.
2. We don’t grow in our devotion to God in isolation, we need each other.
3. We can’t fulfil the ministry and mission God has called each one of us to do, without the support of our church family.

**Suggested questions to ponder and discuss:**

*As you read Ephesians 4:1-16 what type of church is Paul encouraging us to be?*

*What does Paul mean by us all becoming mature?*

*Why might we be reluctant to share with others how our devotion to God or our ministry development is going?*

*What are some practical things that we could do that would facilitate opportunities for meaningful spiritual growth conversations to happen among St Martins C3 members?*

*What might be the positive outcomes of these sorts of conversations and relationships?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Staying the course**

**Read: John 21:15-19**

There are many different types of discipling conversations that we will have with each other. This week we are going to look at a few examples of them.

This one is between Jesus and Peter. Peter messed up big time in denying he even knew Jesus when the pressure was on. Not acceptable behaviour for someone Jesus had called to be a leader in His Church.

Peter assumed that it was an unredeemable mistake, so he might as well go back to his fishing business. Jesus doesn’t see it that way. Jesus uses the strong trusting relationship that He has with Peter to remind Him of God’s call on His life and reassure Peter that he is forgiven by God and it’s time to learn from the mistake and move on.

There might be a number of reasons why we may be tempted to give up on the purposes of God for our lives. We may, like Peter, have fallen into sin. The shame and the guilt may seem overwhelming to us. We may have become distracted or discouraged. What we need at those points in our lives, is a trusted fellow believer to gently restore us as Jesus does with Peter.

We may be tempted to run away like Judas did, but that didn’t end well for him and it wouldn’t end well for us. If you are struggling to stay the course, reach out for help.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Wisdom in community**

**Read: Acts 11:1-18**

The events leading up to Peter going to Cornelius’ house and what happened at Cornelius’ house were very powerful and life-changing for Peter. He was very sure that God was seeking to work in the same way among the Gentiles as He had done among the Jews. However, this was a radical shift in theology and strategy for the early church. Peter was departing from what had been agreed on as a church community.

Imagine yourself in Peter’s situation. I think we would all be pretty nervous about reporting all this back to the church in Jerusalem. Would they receive this change with enthusiasm, or with rejection? If the church doesn’t agree with me, will I submit to that, or will I leave the church? Fortunately, the church agree that God is at work among the Gentiles and fully support Peter’s ongoing mission to them.

The healthy example Peter is setting here is being willing to submit his approach to the church with the expectation that God will speak through the church and guide them together as to what to do next. That requires a lot of humility, but it is healthy and Biblical. There will be times where we have to present something to the church for approval or we will disagree with the church’s decision on something. It won’t always go the way we expect it to go. (speaking from experience) However, the important thing is not only the decision, but the character building in us as we go through the process.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – What is God saying?**

**Read: Acts 15:1-21**

What we most want to know as followers of Christ is God’s will in a particular situation. However, discerning God’s will isn’t always easy. There are many situations where individually applying a scriptural principle isn’t easy. There can be many emotional desires and perspectives that cloud our judgement.

This is why we need the wider body of Christ to help us discern God’s voice on a particular matter. Early on in my pastoral journey another pastor wisely encouraged me to listen to many different voices in the local church and carefully weigh them with scripture. This was very good advice.

In this passage we have the church facing a new issue that they didn’t have clear teaching from Christ on as to how to deal with it. So, they listened and prayed together. Through this process, God guided them.

Just last week, I had a positive experience of this in St Martins C3. As an Eldership Team we were working through a couple of tricky issues that we needed to hear God’s will on. As we talked and prayed together, the next steps of what we were to do emerged.

This process isn’t just for leaders in the church. We are to all seek God’s will. We are to value the voice of God speaking to us through the gathered people of God seeking His will together.

**Thursday’s Devotion – When we disagree**

**Read: Acts 15:36-41**

I like how the Bible is very honest about what happens. “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.” Sometimes we get the impression that everything was lovely and unified in the early church that nothing like this ever happened, but clearly there were tensions, even amongst the leaders. So, what do we do then?

We have previously looked at the topic of restoring relationships and having the courage to have the crucial conversations, so I am not going to cover that today. The important thing I want to highlight is the opportunity we have to learn and grow in our relationship with God and others through these experiences. Sometimes we see them as simply negative events that we want to move on from as quickly as possible. However, God wants to use them to mature us.

Notice the positives here. Paul and Barnabas continue to serve God and do the ministry God had called them to do. They were not just not doing it together. It also shows that two Christians can have quite a different perspective on something, but it doesn’t mean that they can’t continue to respect each other and the work they are doing. For Paul and Barnabas and sometimes for us, it means that we may not be able to work as closely together as we used to. That is a negative, but also an opportunity to make new connections and continue to grow with others in the body of Christ. What have you learnt from a disagreement you have had with someone else?

**Friday’s Devotion – Mentoring opportunities**

**Read: 2 Timothy 1:3-7**

We might get the impression that Timothy had issues. Maybe he was too timid and shy to be a church leader? However, if Timothy wasn’t up for the job Paul would have never asked him to do it. Paul knew that Timothy had the character, calling and capacity to lead the church at Ephesus, but he was encountering some very difficult situations. Therefore, Timothy’s mentor, Paul, writes to encourage him in the task he was to do. This highlights the point that in our spiritual journey we need mentors to speak into our lives and we need to mentor those who need our encouragement.

Take a moment and ponder today, those who have spoken into your life. Consider how just a little thing they have said or done has had an impact on you. Maybe take a moment and thank God for that input. When you reflect on it, it is probably not big things or conversations you have had with them, but just the small things. That is very typical of the way God works. Value the words of wisdom that have come your way.

Most of us will shrink back from thinking of ourselves as a mentor to others, but all of us are setting an example to someone. Others are watching how you are living out your faith. Therefore, there are always opportunities for you to impart what you know to others. Also, if you can think of things others have said to you, then you at least have that to pass on to others. So, there are no excuses, share what you have been given. It will have a bigger impact than you think.