**St Martins C3 – April 7, 2024**

**Iron Sharpens Iron – Growth Conversations**

**Sermon Summary:**

We thrive when there are people in our lives, who intentionally invest in our growth. They may have been a parent, teacher, coach, pastor or friend. Their belief that we can be better than we are now, encouraged us to grow. This intentional one-on-one focused approach is what Jesus used with His disciples and a good thing to integrate into our discipleship journey. It is also what we are going to explore over the next few weeks as a church. Growing in Christ, through intentional one-on-one conversations and relationships. (Proverbs 27:17)

**Read: Matthew 16:13-26**

Jesus was initially addressing the whole group, but then shifts to a one-on-one conversation with Peter. Jesus was taking the opportunity to get personal and specific with Peter. The benefit of the group is that you get a variety of input, but it may not address a specific question or issue that you are working through. Like Peter, we need to be part of large gatherings of Christ followers, but we also need to connect, just one-on-one from time to time. **God uses one-on-one conversations as well as gatherings to help us grow Spiritually.** Because of Peter’s willingness to have these one-on-one conversations about spiritual growth, he matured quickly in His relationship with Christ.

**We also see, in this conversation with Peter, that Jesus does four things that helps Peter grow:**

1. **Jesus provides a safe space for Peter to share openly and honestly.**
2. **Jesus encourages Peter with the call of God on His life.**
3. **Jesus helps Peter identify an area in his life where he needs to grow.**
4. **Jesus follows up and supports Peter to grow in the areas he needs to grow in.**

(We will explore these further over the next few weeks)

What we see in Jesus approach here is a balance between encouragement and challenge. At times, Peter needed to be encouraged, but there were also other times where Peter needed to be challenged.

**As part of the discipleship journey we are on as a church this year, we are encouraging everyone to have intentional one-on-one conversations about their spiritual growth.** The content of those conversations is open-ended questions about what God is doing in your life at the moment. We encourage you to invite someone else to mutually engage in a regular time where you explore what it would look like to grow in Christ.

The last thing to note about Jesus’ approach here, (and something that we will also emphasize on this journey), is that each of us are responsible for our own spiritual growth. Peter needed to work out his discipleship journey and seek relationships that helped him with that, as each of us also need to do. Pastors in the church can assist with ideas, content and suggested connections if needed; however, we are not going to make you form a discipleship connection with someone else. We are simply encouraging you to develop those conversations and relationships yourself.

**Resources for Connect Groups:**

**Main point:** Seeking to develop a healthy one-on-one mutual relationship with someone else in the church for the purpose of helping each other grow in Christ, will accelerate your spiritual growth.

**Discussion questions:**

*Why might we avoid having one-on-one conversations about our faith with other Christians?*

*What might be different with a one-on-one discipleship discussion in contrast with a group discipleship discussion?*

*What stands out to you, in the interaction that Jesus has with Peter in Matthew 16?*

*What might be some of the benefits, and what might be some of the challenges, in catching up with someone and having intentional discipleship conversations with them?*

*In focussing on this approach to discipleship, does it inspire you to intentionally develop a relationship like this with someone else in the church?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Aim for Unity and Harmony**

**Romans 12:3-5 & 16**

*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

This week we are encouraging you to reflect on Romans 12, and the encouragements in it to relate well to each other within the body of Christ.

One of the first and potentially the most important attitude we need to adopt is humility. We grow healthy relationships with others when we see ourselves as equal to them, not above them. Conceit and pride damages relationships. But, thinking of ourselves with sober judgement and serving each other, builds deeper relationships and real community.

Of course, we would all like to think we do this already, but do we? Personally, I have found that I have to prayerfully and intentionally allow God to shape my heart, so that I seek to live in harmony with others and appreciate all that they bring. I have discovered that as we allow God to shape our view of others, we will see the depth and the richness of gifts and character that God has placed in each person’s life. As that happens, we grow in our discipleship and the body of Christ grows closer together.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – The foundation of Love**

**Romans 12:9-10**

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.**Be devoted to one another in love.*

One of the many great books that C S Lewis wrote is called, “The Four Loves.” In it he explains that “Agape” or Christian love is not about having fond feelings for someone else, but rather seeking out what is best for them. This is what Paul is talking about here. We don’t have to wait for some warm feeling of kindness to wash over us before we love those around us. Rather we simply need to develop the underlying approach of seeking what is best for those around us.

So, what does that sort of love look like? Well, consider Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13 in The Message. As you read it today, think of how you would specifically apply it to those you know in our church family.

*Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have. Love doesn’t strut, and doesn’t have a swelled head. Love doesn’t force itself on others. It isn’t always “me first.” Love doesn’t fly off the handle, keep score of the sins of others or revel when others grovel. Love takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything and trusts God always. Love always looks for the best, never looks back and keeps going to the end.*

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Be generous and hospitable**

**Romans 12:13**

*Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

Now Paul starts to get practical. Yes, our hearts need to have a love for others, which is shaped by God’s grace towards us; however, it ought not stop there. Love is also an action. What love in action looks like is sharing the time and money we have with others.

We know that the early church took this encouragement seriously. They saw themselves as an extended family who were there to support each other in any way they could. Those with homes that could accommodate others, did so. Those with money gave it to those who needed it.

There was also a sense of community accountability for those resources that were shared. I suspect that given the closeness of relationships in the church at the time that others would have been aware of what was given for what and continual follow up was given to make sure it was helpful.

Maybe there is something we can learn from the early church in this regard. We need to connect our generosity and our hospitality to our love and relating. Let us not just give and walk away, but invest in people long term, not just meet their needs in the moment. Let us build a sense of family where we walk the journey together and help each other out in a variety of ways.

**Thursday’s Devotion – Be a Blessing**

**Romans 12:14,17,19-21**

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

In the church you will be offended by someone else. Another Christian may actually oppose you and what you are doing. They will certainly fail to meet your expectations at times. All of these things happen, because the church is full of imperfect people. We are all a work in process, and we all do things that muck up relationships and community from time to time.

The Christlike response to this, is to forgive. One of the most radical and difficult things Christ asks us to do. Paul describes what that looks like here. Firstly, our overall approach is to be a BLESSING to others. If we are seeking to bless others, even our enemies, it will show Christlike love to them.

The next thing Paul encourages us to do, is pass over judgement of the person to God, rather than taking it on ourselves to judge them. This shows that we truly trust in God’s ability rather than our ability to make things right. Finally, Paul encourages us to have the overall approach of overcoming evil with good. May we be known for seeking the best for others, rather than judging others. Let us simply leave the judgement to God.

**Friday’s Devotion – Seek peace not division**

**Romans 12:18**

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

I have discovered that this is an important life perspective to adopt. Life will go better for you, if you seek to “be at peace” with everyone. Why make an enemy, when you can make a friend? Why “burn bridges” when you don’t need to? I have watched people walk away from families, churches, workplaces and relationships and not leave them well. That makes no sense to me. Why not seek to resolve the issues and be at peace? You never know when you might need those relationships again. The church in particular ought to be a place where we seek to live in peace with each other. Don’t let little issues become big deals. Seek to resolve it and be at peace with each other. It is good for you, good for the church and a good witness to the world.

Notice that Paul also says, “as far as it depends on you.” This is important. There are some relationship situations that can’t be resolved because the other party doesn’t want to resolve it, despite your best efforts to find a peaceful solution. Paul reminds us here, that we are not responsible for how the other party responds. We need to simply focus on our attitude and actions and let them choose their response.

We have a wonderful church family that already exemplifies the attitude and actions that we have talked about this week. Let us continue to build on that foundation and see to continue to build strong relationships which honour Christ’s work in us.