

Discipleship - Intimacy leads to Affirmation

Romans 8:26-30

Matthew 3:13-17

During this year the PCC and the leadership team have made Discipleship a priority.

Last week we looked at what a disciple is and started to look at what discipleship does.

So, if we consider ourselves as disciples or apprentices in the faith then how do we engage in discipleship - those activities and attitudes that help us grow closer to God and become stronger in faith and more confident in sharing. How do we become more Christ-like?

Paul Harcourt - in the book we are using to develop our discipleship (Growing in circles) says that Spiritual Growth is not about effort but about our response to God. He is saying it's not how much we do or read or serve or know or speak but it is our willingness to say "God help me to get closer to you, be more like you and understand your will for my life more."

But this response starts with understanding that closeness - he calls it Intimacy. Although it's not a word I like, it does remind us that we are not talking about proximity and space, but about how close we feel to God, how we understand him more.

Although we have very little comment in the gospels about his childhood, we get glimpses in the story of Jesus at the temple where he was still fully aware of his relationship with God the Father.

If that is the case then if we are wanting to get closer to God, then how aware are we of him in our lives. Have we connected our heads and our hearts - we know God died for our sins and to break down the barriers that separate us from him BUT is that an internal feeling that we feel, being ever aware that God is fully involved with us.

Now I have an issue with some words - I don't like them - they make me cringe or wince, some make me shudder. I try not to use them. Moist, Phlegm. I don't like words that are stuck together - a seminar over the internet is a webinar, a muffin that is made with croissant ingredients is a cruffin, a croissant made into a donut is a cronut.

And so here I struggle with the word Intimacy. I don't know about other people but it feels much too personal a word to use in public and certainly not to drop it into a sermon or write a book about it. But we are right to use it in this context because actually it helps us to understand that kind of relationship that we are aiming grow into with God the father through his son Jesus Christ.

It is about being emotionally close with God.

It is about him knowing everything about me and me being comfortable about that.

It is about me being the real me, the me that I am deep down and knowing that God still loves me for the person I am and that He still wants to bless me and pour out his holy spirit on me and into my life.

The words that he speaks over Jesus in the Jordan river echo through the ages to us.

This is my child, whom I love. I am really pleased.

And this too is where we get personal. I don't know if you've picked up the fact that sometimes I use we...we could do this, if we want to get closer...sometimes I use me or I...i wonder about this, I question, I want to know God more...

Church is often a very corporate occasion.

Not pinstripe suits and briefcases.

It's an occasion when we come as a group.

We come to be together, to offer our prayers to Almighty God, we sing of our love...the liturgy and the hymnal is very corporate.

The opening lines in Common Worship or the Book of Common Prayer are corporate invitations.

But in this situation. In this case. In this Intimacy we are individually being called. We are individually being drawn closer to Him who made the world and the stars and who made us.

Scripture is littered with examples of where the psalmist, the prophets, the gospels and the epistles are abounding in personal invitations from God to us. To you. To me.

Jesus calls us His siblings and not His servants. We are called children of God. We are called chosen.

When was the last time you sat and thought about what it is like to be chosen by God and to be one of His children.

I read a book a long time ago - I've read more since - but I read a book years ago that says 'If you want to make an important decision, imagine that you have made your choice and go around for a few hours or even a couple of days if you can as if you have made that choice. How does it feel, what might be the impact, Does it feel right? And then make the other choice and try that and see which one - like a new pair of shoes - feels right, feels comfortable.'

This week I might do that with this. Remind myself of the personal nature of God's invitation. God's adoption of me through Christ and that His love just flows into me every day. What does that do to me? What does it feel like? What does that do to the way I act or talk? What does that do to the way I think about people, about how generous I am, how forgiving I am?

I might repeat the phrase to myself - this is what God says to me - this is my child, I love him and with him I am well pleased.

Does that make me want to sit with him more?

Does that make me want to hear him in my thoughts more?

Does that make me see him more in my life?

Does it help me to understand that all his affection, all his hopes are just to see me loved?

Because when we find someone we want to get closer to - what do we do to get closer to them, love them more? We spend time with them. We listen to them, we listen to their stories and try and understand everything that they've done and what their likes and dislikes are. We listen out for the way they talk and the way they talk to us. We enjoy them speaking words of love to us, we remember and retell ourselves the words they've used to describe us and how they've demonstrated their love for us.

I think it is no different with God.

But as we might worry about our love for another being conditional - on us being tall enough, good looking enough, qualified enough...God's love is unconditional. And with his love comes affirmation.

Unconditional Affirmation. And like his grace and his holy spirit it just flows from him to us without us needing to be clever enough or tall enough or good looking enough or good with words or holy enough.

We don't have to work for it. And because we don't have to work for it, it means we can live our lives from that as a starting place.

A starting place that says God loves you so much that he sent his son to die for you so that you could be close to God.

He did all that and daily sends his holy spirit into your life so that there is nothing in the way of us getting close to God.

As he died the curtain that separated God from his people was torn from top to bottom - so that never again would there be a barrier between us and God. There would no longer be a question of us being not enough ever again.

It's like going shopping when everything is free.

It's like going on a journey when the fuel is never going to run out.

It's like sharing all that you have knowing that there will always be enough and there will always be enough left over.

So what do we do with that news. What do we do with those feelings? Being so loved that we are adopted into God's eternal family.

Being so loved that God wants to send the Holy Spirit into your life every day.

- Do we need to convince ourselves afresh that this is all true? We may need to do that before we try and convince other people that he loves them too.
- Do we remind ourselves that Christ tore the curtain for us so that we can get closer to God and do we need to think about if we put barriers up for other people to get closer to God? How do we welcome people? How do we offer to spend time with people, eat with people, listen to people.
- How might we do things differently in our lives to get closer to God? Do we need to set aside time to listen for him, do we need to set aside time or look for opportunities to read scripture and hear other people's understanding of how God is acting in the life.

Do we need to spend time thinking about the times in our lives when God has been close to us, when the holy spirit has been real to us, when we look back and think 'that was God' acting in my life? Do we write those down, do we share those with friends?

Lots to think about - and if you want to talk or share your thoughts about what this means for you then find someone to talk to - in a gift group, one of the leadership team, a member of the prayer ministry team - talk and recognise that that action will bring you - his ever so loved child - closer to God.

Amen.

Let us Pray

Heavenly Father, you show your love for us each day by sending the Holy Spirit into our lives. We give you thanks.

Lord Jesus, you tore down the barriers that stop us from getting close to you and receiving your grace. We give you thanks.

Holy Spirit help us to feel personally connected with our God, aware of his presence in our lives and closer than we could ever know. May we know it and feel it and act accordingly.

Amen