

Sunday, 4 July 2021

Announcements

Good morning church family, another week in lockdown. Rachel and I are hoping that you're keeping safe in this time. So I wanted to make some announcements this morning about church.

Firstly, as you know, we're in lockdown in Sydney. So please keep us safe during this time. But according to the NSW Health orders, I can visit you if you require a pastoral visit. I want to let you know that is available to you if you need it. Please just let me know. I'll be sure to wear my mask and keep socially distant. If you need a phone call and a prayer, just let me know, please.

Secondly, you probably already guessed it but the Brazilian harvest festival has been postponed. We'll have to see how things go with this lockdown.

Thirdly, we have our trivia night on Friday, 23 July starting at 6:30pm. It's \$15 per person. Obviously we're going to see how the lockdown goes but God willing things will be okay in a couple of weeks time. For more information, please speak to Lorraine White.

Reading and Prayer

We're going to read Psalm 46,

Psa. 46:0 To the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamo. A Song.

Psa. 46:1 God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah

Psa. 46:4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

7 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Psa. 46:8 Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.

10 "Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"

11 The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

We're going to say the Lord's prayer together,

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Devotional

Today, I thought it would be good for us to spend a little time reflecting on our relationship with God. With the lockdown happening, many of us are spending a lot of time at home. There's only so much Netflix you can watch. But this lockdown has caused us to slow down. Talking to Lorraine this week, all the church hall users have had to take these two weeks off. So I'm going to share a little bit about what's on my heart this week.

In this last week of lockdown, the story of Mary and Martha came to mind.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42 (ESV)

I have to say that this is one of my favourite passages in the bible. Don't get me wrong, I'm not someone who is lazy. I know, I may not be an early bird like many of you are. I'm a night owl, I do my best work at night. In fact, I was writing this sharing late at night this week. But the reason why it's one of my favourite passages is because it reminds me that being a Christian is simple. It's really simple. Now, don't hear me say that it's easy, but it's simple.

Do you hear what's happening in the passage? Martha is running around serving. We should commend Martha for her hard work. She's serving, there's Jesus, and

not just Jesus. There's also his twelve disciples there. And there may have been many more. People to feed, clothes to wash maybe. Maybe you understand Martha. I do! I mean, when people come over to the manse, Rachel's running around, I'm washing up, it can get a little crazy. I mean, I love the excitement, I love the activity. I love serving people. Cooking for them, serving up food. And it's what we do at church, don't we? We like to be busy.

But I want us to pay attention to what Jesus says. Because when Martha sees Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, she's angry isn't she? Why is Mary doing nothing, when I'm busy slaving away in the kitchen. I remember when Rachel and I first got married and we were living in Roseville. And she had cooked dinner, and then I decided I would clean, but you know, I wanted her to help. Probably not the same but you get the idea. Why is Mary just sitting and listening to Jesus? What does Jesus say? "One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her"

Did you catch that? One thing is necessary. I love that Jesus says that. I'm a guy, and I'm terrible with multitasking. If I'm watching sport on television, Rachel can say anything and I won't hear it. Don't talk to me when the State of Origin is on. The Christian life is simple, one thing is necessary and that is to sit at Jesus' feet. To listen to Jesus.

I know that for many of us, we're feeling really restless. It feels like we're spinning wheels right now. But have you considered, that being helpless, not being able to be busy is actually a good thing? Like actually a good thing? C.S. Lewis wrote a book called the Screwtape letters. If you haven't read the book, it's a series of "letters" that a senior devil whose name is Screwtape writes. He writes to his nephew giving him hints about how to distract humans. How to make humans turn away from God. In one of his letters, he talks about noise and the importance of noise in distracting humans. He writes this,

Music and silence-how I detest them both!....[Hell](#) has been occupied by Noise-Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile-Noise which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples and impossible desires. We will make the whole universe a noise in the end....The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end.

What Screwtape is saying is that noise is from the devil. Silence is from God. In fact, in John's vision in Revelation, he sees the spiritual realm. And one of the images is

the lamb of God opening a seal, a scroll, and we're told that there's silence for half an hour. Silence in the past has been seen as something that's really important. For example,

St. John Climacus, a 6th century Christian monk said this "The friend of silence draws near to God."

Corrie Ten Boom, said that "If the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy."

Non-Christians see it too. Cal Newport, maybe you know him, he's written books like Deep Work and A World without Email. Cal Newport argues for the importance of focus. He recently gave the example of Beethoven, who lost his hearing in his later life. But Cal Newport suggests that his deafness actually helped inspire him to write music. He says, "In our current techno-cultural moment, we're constantly connected to a humming online hive mind of takes and urgency and quantified influence."

Our society is one that's really busy, our society is loud. I don't mean to hark on it but now we have distraction in the palm of our hands. Our smartphones means that we never have to be quiet. We never have to be bored. And that's dangerous for Christians.

Because the one thing that is necessary is to spend time with Jesus. To slow down. What's the greatest command? To love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. It's not the greatest option. It's the greatest command. How can we do that if we don't slow down? We see other people of the Scriptures slow down, like King David,

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. Psalm 27:4 (ESV)

The one thing that David asks for is that he sit in the house of the LORD. One of our favourite Psalms that we like to hear and sing is Psalm 46, God is our strength and refuge. What does the Psalmist say at the end? Be still and know that he is God. And what about Paul?

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:8-11 (ESV)

Paul's relationship with Jesus was number one. All through scripture, we see that our relationship with Jesus, sitting at his feet, being still and knowing, dwelling in his house, that's what we are called to do.

I'm not saying that we don't have responsibilities. I know that some of you have children, some of you work full time. They're all important. But what is the one thing that centres your life? What is the one thing that is your focus? Like a camera, what is the focus of your picture, your life? If you're a Christian, it's simple, it's to love Jesus. What about my children? My spouse? My family? My friends? Well, I tell you if you love Jesus, then it's going to overflow into the rest of your life.

So I'm going to get super practical here and talk about two questions. Firstly, how should we slow down? And secondly, how do we sit at Jesus' feet?

Slowing Down

How should we slow down? I've got some suggestions for you to slow down.

Firstly, big one. Unsubscribe to streaming services. Netflix, Amazon, Stan. They're like an infinite pool. They just keep going. Or maybe you could put a quota on the amount of television that you watch. Recently, I changed my screen to grayscale, and it makes television really boring.

Secondly, put your phone into AOB. Cal Newport talks about that. What is AOB? You put your phone on Airplane mode, Turn it Off and then put it in your bag. You know, when you have your phone on your table, your attention gets diverted to it. And you know how much of a blackhole smartphones can be.

Thirdly, if you have children, I think that's a hard one. I remember reading Elisabeth Elliot who said that you could encourage your children to help with the chores. They don't always have to be on iPads or watching television. In fact, I recently read a book that suggests that screens can really disrupt children and the author in fact encouraged an electronic screen fast for three weeks. That's pretty heavy, but research suggests it helps children focus. Elisabeth Elliot also tells the story of a

mother putting the apron over her head as a sign to her children that she was not to be disturbed.

Sitting at Jesus' Feet

How to sit at Jesus' feet? Well before I give you suggestions, I think we have to see that we have a relationship with Jesus. In a moment, I'm going to suggest that you read your bibles, but you don't read your bibles just to get head knowledge. This isn't school. You read your bibles, so that you encounter Jesus, you spend time with Jesus, you waste time with Jesus. Think of it like how you might invite a friend over to your house, and you have a conversation. You listen to your friend talk, you read a Psalm, a scripture passage. Then you talk to your friend, you talk to Jesus. When you read your bibles, I want you to see God's love for you. Maybe you might read Psalm 23, and you'll see yes! Jesus is the good shepherd. The one who loves me! Thank you Jesus. I don't want you to read the Scriptures just to get knowledge, I want you to enjoy the one who loves you.

So now, here are just two suggestions.

Firstly, why not go for a walk outside for 10, 20, 30 minutes today. And talk to Jesus about what's on your heart. Why not read a Psalm whilst you're at it. I heard of this wonderful suggestion recently. What you do is you read a Psalm like Psalm 23, you read a line, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And then you tell Jesus your thoughts in response to it. It can be anything.

Secondly, I know that I really enjoy writing my prayers down. Why don't you do that today? Write down your thoughts, your joys, your prayers points down? As you read a passage of Scripture, why don't you write down your responses to it? I have a suggestion, the Swedish method, where you read a passage of Scripture and you answer five questions. Lightbulb: What stood out to you? Question mark: What questions do you have? Cross: What do we learn about Jesus? Prayer: What can you pray about? Arrow: What can I change in my life?

Thirdly, why don't you read one of the Paul's epistles over and over? Here's a challenge, read through the book of Ephesians 20 times this week. If you read the letter in one sitting it can be done in twenty minutes. Do that twenty times. I guarantee it will change you!

Those are my suggestions this week.

All I want to do this week is to encourage you. Encourage you to slow down and sit with our Lord Jesus. It's the best thing that you can do. And the aim is to get to know him. Get to know his love for you. His magnificent love for you. And for you to speak to him.

Let me pray.

Lord, please help us to sit with Jesus. To slow down, find time in our week so that we can grow in our love for Him. Please show us that he loves us so much. In his name we pray, Amen.

Church Family Prayer

I've asked Rachel to pray the church family prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father,

We give you praise for you are a loving and sovereign God. You are just, yet full of grace for your people. Thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus, that for those who believe in His death and resurrection and follow Him, they are given eternal life. Thank you that you are a God who cares for us, who understands us, who knows us more than we could ever know ourselves. Thank you that you never leave us or forsake us. Even in the loneliest of times, we can rest assured of your presence.

Lord during this period of lockdown, we pray for each of our congregation members. It is a difficult and lonely time for some. Fill our hearts with thankfulness each day. Help us count our blessings. Give us motivation to get out of bed each day and make every moment, every action and every decision count in building your kingdom and in glorifying you. Help us grasp onto your truths, that we may draw comfort from your word.

Help us to trust, hope, and know that your love never fails. We may not understand why difficult things happen on earth and how it is a part of your plan, but we pray your will be done and we long for the day where there will only be joy. We pray for those in our church family who are mourning the loss of a loved one, those who are burdened with health issues, those who are wrestling with life itself. Grant them peace Lord, fill their hearts with comfort and surround them with your love. Help us

to trust in You and be salt and light for the world. Help us care for one another and to strive to live for you each day.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Closing

That's the end of our shortened service this week. Hopefully, we're going to be able to meet in person next week. I'll be sure to let you know if we can, by email, phone, Facebook, website. But in the meantime, I thought I'd share this song, you might know it, and it spoke to me because really the greatest thing that we can experience is our relationship with Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I pray that we would love Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. But more importantly, may you rest in Jesus' love for you. He was willing to die for you even whilst you and I were still his enemies. That's his great love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTtISx6zXio>