

Week 3

Prayer – reading after prayer

*Christ has no body now, but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
with compassion on this world.*

*Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing frighten you.
All things pass away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Those who have God
find they lack nothing;
God alone suffices.*

Did any of you do the Well of Life activity (see sheet)?

This week we're starting by looking at a subject dear to my heart – teaching. One way in which we can teach is passing on what we know to others in the Christian community around us. Actually I do quite a lot of teaching, I often teach our group here, I teach a men's group every Tuesday morning and tomorrow I'm doing a Teaching Morning on The Cross at HTC Cannes.

How can we teach about the good news and the kingdom?
If you think you can't teach, think about the difference the Good news has made in your life. Could you share that? That's one way of teaching.

Scripture has much to say about teaching

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16 NIV)

“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” (Tit 2:1 NIV)

“Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.” (Tit 2:2-3 NIV)

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.” (1 Jo 2:27 NIV)

I think the daily material that spoke most to me in this week was day 3. Keith Nelson said that teachers were people who knew how to ask the right question and that we could learn much about that by looking at the kind of questions Jesus asked. He pointed out that in the

early church new Christians were taught throughout Lent and then baptised at Easter. Then they'd be initiated into the mysteries of the Eucharist and taught more deeply about baptism and Holy Communion. He said that today our liturgy can teach us a lot and we should stop and process it and ask the questions and take the lessons from it that God has for us.

Another thing our course material mentioned for this week was baptism. In the waters of Baptism we are "sealed by the Holy Spirit...and marked as Christ's own forever" (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 308). We are adopted in love to be God's own sons and daughters forever. The waters of Baptism remind us that nothing can separate us from this love. It is ever flowing.

Living into this covenant can be difficult. We are not meant to do it alone. After Christ was baptized, he joined up with his disciples to share life with them. He lived in community. He and his disciples traveled together, ate together, prayed together, and shared their lives with one another. They supported one another, forgave one another, bore patiently with one another – in short, they were channels of God's love to one another.

In our own communities of faith, we are called to do the same. In our Baptismal Covenant, those in the church promise to support those who are baptized in their life with Christ. We promise to help these new Christians grow in this new life which is God's gift to us. We promise to help them become disciples, followers of Christ. We do this together, as the Body of Christ.

Think about this description of the common life of the early Christians:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

(Acts 2:44-47)

What can we learn from this early Christian Community?

What do you think the Christian community today is?

What sets Christian communities apart from other communities?

CASE STUDIES

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

In Baptism, we are called to pursue peace and justice for all people, especially those with no voice. We are called to respect every person in the communities where we live, especially those who often times are rejected.

Read the case study below, which is all about respecting the dignity of every human being through community-life rooted in God's love:

In the early sixties in France, the mentally ill were often sent away to asylums to live their days outside of the community. A man by the name of Jean Vanier witnessed the deep sadness of these institutions. The ill living their days in complete isolation, surrounded by concrete walls.

He felt called by God to speak up on behalf of those who had no voice of their own. So he started at home. He invited two men from the institution to move in with him. He cared for them as his own family. Others began to see the hope in what he was doing. They wanted to be part of it.

Vanier began to call this movement 'L'Arche'- which means 'the ark' in French. It started to grow all over France and then slowly spread to other parts of the world. L'Arche started from catholic roots and grew into communities for people of all faiths.

Around the world today there are 147 L'Arche communities (18 in the US). These are places that nurture the dignity of every person in their households. Homes consist of people with and without disabilities, living and working together as one family.

What makes these homes special is that all members are seeking to grow in their walk with God. Prayer, conversation and service is at the core of their day-to-day life together. The focus is that all are striving to live more gently and fully into God's love.

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Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

In Baptism, we are called to proclaim the Good News of Christ by the examples of our lives and by how we live into community.

- *Where have you seen or been part of a similar community of faith (one that was active, alive, making a difference in the world, and living into Christ's love in beautiful ways)?*
- *What are some of the challenges or obstacles faced by communities of faith in today's world? What are some possible ways we might overcome these obstacles together?*
- *What would an ideal community of disciples look like to you? (It can be a good thing to strive for an ideal.)*

Week 4

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

This week we're focusing on the third Mark of Mission – responding to human need by loving service.

Did anyone do the God sighting activity? If so what indications of need did you see around you? What's been a sign of God's love to us?

Lot's of the material spoke to me this week, but just to select one item I liked the opening message on Day 1. It only takes a glance at the news to realise that we are surrounded by human suffering. Suffering is a part of the human condition and none of us completely escapes it. People suffer from sickness, from loss, from violence, from aggression, from greed. There are so many causes and reasons for suffering in this world. And God has entered into our suffering. God has come to us in Jesus Christ and has taken on human form and identified God's self with human suffering, even to the point of death on a cross. God cares for us and God comes to be with us and meet us in our places of need and suffering.

And so those who share and bear God's life in the world are also inclined to respond to human suffering. God's love within us reaches out to those in need and those who are hurting. God's love for them flows in us and through us. So a mark of the body of Christ in the world, a Mark of Mission, a Mark of Love, that has been important since the founding of the church has been to respond to human need by loving service. Service has always been part of the Christian vocation.

We have to be cautious that our service isn't just imposed on others, but that we come to people in need with genuine humility, with a posture of listening and openness. We want to listen deeply to their pain and to understand their circumstances, to come alongside them, and to offer to stand next to them, to support them, and to help in whatever way we can. We don't come with our own agenda. We come listening in humility to understand what God is doing in the lives of those who are needy and suffering, and then asking God how we can participate in what God is already doing. God's mission is to be with the needy, to lift them up and restore them, and to heal them, and to bring them love. And we can be channels of

that mission in the world if we listen and are sensitive to God's voice and the voices of those in need.

Jesus said a lot about service – he said that he came to be a servant:

“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”” (Mt 20:25-28 NIV)

and he made it clear that we must be serving God and not the world:

““No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”” (Lu 16:13 NIV)

Listen to this admonition from the author of the First Letter of John:

... if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:17-18)

- What does this phrase, “let us not love in word or talk but *in deed and in truth*” mean to you? Can you give some examples that might illustrate what John had in mind here?
- How can we recognize when we are offering love *in deed and in truth*? If there is a way of serving “in truth,” is there also a way of serving “falsely” or “in falsehood”?

Hear these words of Jesus:

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

- This verse offers us one motivation for engaging in acts of service: namely, that loving and serving others is a way of offering love and service to Christ. What are some other motivations – both *healthy* and *unhealthy* – that we might have for offering ourselves in works of service? Why is it important to examine our motives?
- Have you ever had the experience of someone trying to “serve” you in ways that were actually not helpful? How can we best ensure that our service is timely and appropriate?
- Can you remember a time when someone “served” you in a helpful way? What was it about the service they offered (or the way in which they offered it) that was especially helpful?
- As you look at the world's need (or your community's need), to what or to whom are you most drawn?

Where do you think Christ is active today in:

- Start with the first ring – our **Church Community**. Where is Christ alive in our church community? What specific opportunities for nurturing God's love do you see there? What are the greatest needs in our church community?

- Move to the next ring – our **Local Community**. Where is Christ alive in our local community? What specific opportunities for nurturing God’s love do you see there? What are the greatest needs in our local community?
- End with the last ring – our **Global Community**. Where is Christ alive in our global community? What specific opportunities for nurturing God’s love do you see there? What are the greatest needs of our global community?