

# Sermon - *Being Disciples – Forgiveness and Prayer*

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**Athelstone Uniting Church #58**  
**10 March 2019**

**Text:** Matthew 7 : 7 – 12; 6 : 9 – 15 [NIV]

## **Pray**

Let's pray:

Nurturing God,  
we do not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from your mouth.

Make us hungry for this heavenly food,  
that it may nourish us today  
in the ways of eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Lent**

We are now in the season we call Lent. For some, this can be a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. For some, it can be a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, many Christians focus on their relationship with God, sometimes choosing to give up something or to take up something - such as a spiritual discipline or to give of themselves for others.

In this particular Lent season, my hope is that together we will become more attentive to Jesus, so that we will discover more about what God is like.

It is a season when we are reflecting on what it means to *be* Christian disciples ...

## **'Being Disciples' by Rowan Williams.**

And the way we're doing that is through Rowan Williams' book, *Being Disciples*.

The book itself was not written as a Lenten study, however its theme of discipleship is about learning to *be* and *do* that to which followers of Jesus are called.

And a reminder that we have copies of the book available - contact Sharyn during Office hours for more information.

And if you want to go deeper, there are Discussion Questions available to be used after reading each chapter. There are some in the book

plus

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<sup>1</sup> Prayers from *Uniting in Worship 2*

I have collated a new resource with content from Brian Ball, Dean Brook and Dean Pearce. This was emailed out last week. Again, ask Sharyn if you would like a printed copy.

And ..I want to emphasise that they make a lot more sense when you've read the book!

## Disciples

Last week we examined what a Christian disciple is:

We can simply say that it is someone who follows Jesus

And someone who tries to live out Jesus' teachings

Someone who is both a follower and a learner

Discipleship is about how we *live* - not just the decisions we make, not just the things we believe, but a state of *being*....

Of being *aware and attentive*

Of being *with / abiding with Jesus*

Christian disciples are always expectant – they expect, anticipate, a new thought or idea or vision to come

And as Christian disciples we have the Holy Spirit to lead us, to guide us, to energise our awareness and to kindle our expectancy. So, like the first disciples, we look and listen. We watch with expectancy the world in which we live. We listen for the Word to come alive for us in Scripture.

To be a disciple is to abide with Jesus - to stay with him, to pay attention to him, to expect to learn from him.

## Forgiveness and Prayer

This week we have jumped ahead to chapter 3 of the book which is about forgiveness and prayer.

Prayer is our main form of 2-way communication with Jesus.

It is through prayer that we bring our concerns, our confessions, our needs to Jesus and it is through prayer that we can hear from Jesus, as he whispers to us – when we wait patiently and in anticipation.

Our prayer reflects what we are thinking – what our needs are – what is important to us

The more intentional we are about our prayer the more it can help shape us to be more like Jesus in what we do and say

Both of the gospel readings this morning were about prayer, and both mentioned bread in some way.

First, Jesus says that a parent would not give their child a stone if they ask for bread! (bread at the time looked like flat stones – so would be a natural comparison)

Bread was seen as a common staple – readily available to everyone – even if it came in different forms.

When a child asks for bread – even today - it is usually because they are hungry – they are asking for a *need* to be met – to feed their body

Rowan Williams takes this idea further – our needs can include our physical nourishment as well as our human dignity – and our need to be loved.

“bread was a powerful symbol of God’s provision for His people in the Old Testament. We remember how God cared for the Israelites when they were in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. Life in the wilderness was hard, and soon the people began to complain that it would be better to be back in Egypt, where they had wonderful food to eat. In response to these complaints, God promised to “rain bread from heaven”<sup>2</sup>. The next morning, when the dew lifted, there remained behind on the ground “a small round substance, as fine as frost... . It was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey”<sup>3</sup> When God miraculously fed His people from heaven, he did so by giving them bread.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus encourages us to ask for our needs to be met

“God our father in heaven is good and more willing than any loving parent on earth to give what is good to his children. As father he invites his children to trust him and come to him with their needs”<sup>5</sup>.

Ask. Search. Knock.

By doing this we are recognising that we are not self sufficient – we need God to meet our needs. And we need others.

Praying for our daily bread then is asking to be reacquainted with our vulnerability, to learn how to approach not only God but each other with our hands open.<sup>6</sup>

I read that

“after the Korean War ended, South Korea was left with a large number of children who had been orphaned by the war. Relief agencies spoke about a problem they encountered with the children who were in the orphanages. Even though the children had three meals a day provided for them, they were restless and anxious at night and had difficulty sleeping. As they talked to the children, they soon discovered that the children had great anxiety about whether they would have food the next day. To help resolve this problem, the relief workers in one particular orphanage decided that each night when the children were put to bed, the nurses there would place a single piece of bread in each child’s hand. The bread wasn’t intended to be eaten; it was simply intended to be held by the children as they went to sleep. It was a “security blanket” for them, reminding them that there would be provision for their daily needs. Sure enough, the bread calmed the children’s anxieties and helped them sleep.

Likewise, we take comfort in knowing that our needs are met, that we have food, or “bread,” for our needs.<sup>7</sup>

Praying is an expression of trust in our God who knows our needs for the present and the future before we even ask.

## **We are forgiven**

In the Lord’s Prayer, the very next thing to be asked for, after bread, is forgiveness.. – or rather, for the gift of being forgiven as we have learned to forgive.

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<sup>2</sup> (Ex. 16:4)

<sup>3</sup> (vv. 14, 31).

<sup>4</sup> *The Prayer of the Lord* by R.C. Sproul.. <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-give-us-day-our-daily-bread-mean/>

<sup>5</sup> New Interpreters Bible - One volume commentary (Abingdon)

<sup>6</sup> Williams R: Being Disciples p38

<sup>7</sup> *The Prayer of the Lord* by R.C. Sproul.. <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-give-us-day-our-daily-bread-mean/>

Williams says that when we ask for forgiveness, we acknowledge that we are hungry for healing, for the bread of acceptance and restoration to relationship.

We take a risk by stepping out of our safety zone and making ourselves vulnerable – just as the one who forgives. Forgiveness is one of the most radical ways in which we are able to nourish one another's humanity.

To deny the possibilities of forgiveness would be to say that there are those I have no need of because they have offended me, or because they have refused to extend a hand to me. A willingness to forgive is clearly the mark of a humanity touched by God – free from anxiety about identity and safety, free to reach out into what is the other, as God does in Jesus Christ. It is a matter of being prepared to acknowledge that I cannot grow or flourish without restored relationship.

Forgiveness is the exchange of the bread of life and the bread of truth; it is the way in which those who have damaged each other's humanity and denied its dignity are brought back into a relation where each feeds the other and nurtures their dignity.<sup>8</sup>

## Forgiveness

So what do others say about forgiveness?

Maya Angelou said that it is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself.

Nicky Gumbel said that holding a grudge is like allowing someone else to live rent free in your head.

Marianne Williamson said that forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness.

Desmond Tutu said that the simple truth is, we all make mistakes, and we all need forgiveness. When I talk of forgiveness, he said, I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too.

T D Jakes said that we think that forgiveness is weakness, but it's absolutely not; it takes a very strong person to forgive.

And when it comes to forgiving ourselves:

Sherri Shepherd said "I think its harder to forgive ourselves for mistakes that we made because we keep dwelling on it. We want to know how it affects other people, if they liked us for it, if they didn't like us. I think we stress over it, we replay it in our mind. It becomes an old tape that years alter we continue to play it in our mind.

Lewis B Smedes said that the Holy Spirit, thank God, often enables people to forgive even though they are not sure how they did it.

Let us remember that Jesus encouraged us to bring our prayers to him. To ask, to seek, to knock

He gave us a pattern for prayer in The Lord's Prayer

And we can be assured that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Williams R: Being Disciples p41

Quoting Paul in his letter to the Romans:

**Romans 8:33-39**

<sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Amen

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:33-39

## Guided prayer<sup>10</sup>

We are going to spend some time in prayer now. I invite you to get as comfortable as you can in your seat, to breathe deeply and slowly, to relax your mind, and body, and to be open to God's grace and mercy as I lead you in this prayer.

Let us be still before the Lord  
Rest quietly in his presence  
Listen<sup>11</sup>

Let my words be your prayer:

Jesus, you have shown me such love,  
and stretched out your arms  
to draw me into your embrace.<sup>12</sup>

I love you and adore you, Jesus

Because through the cross you have forgiven me and loved me.

Lord I come to you acknowledging just how much I need you.

Holy Spirit reveal to me now who it is that you need me to forgive.

As I picture this person, help me to see them as you see them. As beloved.

Help me to forgive them – to let go of this burden I have been carrying. Give me the strength and courage and willingness to forgive.

As different people and situations come to mind, I hand them over to you Lord. I forgive them. I let go.

I choose to love – because you first loved.

And Lord, I choose to forgive myself

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<sup>10</sup> Inspired by <https://thevalueofsparrows.com/2013/12/02/prayer-a-guided-prayer-of-forgiveness/>

<sup>11</sup> Read more at: [http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers\\_Repentance.htm#ixzz5hfy2ll8C](http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Repentance.htm#ixzz5hfy2ll8C) Under Creative Commons License: [Attribution](#)

<sup>12</sup> Read more at: [http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers\\_Repentance.htm#ixzz5hfxYLS1i](http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Repentance.htm#ixzz5hfxYLS1i) Under Creative Commons License: [Attribution](#)

For words and action that may have hurt others  
and for words and action left unsaid and undone.

For the mistakes I have made, the pain I have caused.

I am sorry

Forgive me those times  
when I consider myself to be of little value.  
Remind me constantly  
that you died for me before I even knew you.

I want to move forward with you, Lord,  
but I am held back by burdens I carry,  
afraid to let go, lessen the load,  
let myself become vulnerable  
to be loved and in turn love,  
to receive and in turn give.

I want to move forward with you, Lord.  
and so I choose to forgive myself.<sup>13</sup>

And Lord if I need to take further action, through a note or a phone call or a card, please give me the courage and the words to do so – and may those words be received with grace.

Gracious, merciful Lord, help me to know the joy of forgiveness; the joy of burdens taken away; the joy of new life in Christ

Thank you Jesus for your word of grace to us: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Amen

## Lord's Prayer

And so let us pray together the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us:

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<sup>13</sup> Read more at: [http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers\\_Repentance.htm#ixzz5hfxpBg68](http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Repentance.htm#ixzz5hfxpBg68) Under Creative Commons License: [Attribution](#)

**Our Father in heaven  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven  
Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us**

**Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**