

Sermon - *Being disciples – Faith in Society*

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Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 [NIV]



Have you ever wondered if the things you do in life make a difference? Do you think it's possible to bring change to our hurting world?

I hope to answer these questions and more as we continue our series on Being Disciples.

Let's pray:

God of love, we thank you that you have called us to follow the way of Jesus. As we reflect on the Word today, show us how to follow closer and catch your vision for a world where all are loved and valued and caught up in your loving embrace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Being Disciples series

So, as I mentioned we are in a Lenten series of Being Disciples. ...And we are already in week 5!

We've been working through Rowan Williams' book by the same name: Being Disciples.

we have been examining life as a Christian disciple:

someone who follows Jesus

And someone who tries to live out Jesus' teachings

Someone who is *attentive*

Who abides *with Jesus*

Who prays with expectancy

asking for needs to be met and trusting that God will take care of them

Disciples understand themselves as forgiven and are willing to forgive

We have *faith* in God who loves us and does not let us go

We have *hope* because whoever we are God *loves* us now as much as God loved us in the past and will continue to love us into the future. And it is this hope that sustains us because of God's great faithfulness.

Then last week Victoria preached about holiness... perhaps challenging our ideas about what holiness means and inspiring us to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, to be captivated by the love and extravagant grace of God, and in so

doing to be transformed ourselves and made holy – helping all we meet to be captivated by the wonder and awe of the God we worship.

All of these sermons are available to listen to or read on our website.

And that brings us to this week and Rowan Williams' chapter on *Faith in Society*.

Ripple effect



Have you heard of the term, the ripple effect?

When you drop something in water, ripples start expanding outwards, getting bigger as they go.

This term is used in many different ways but especially in relation to the way a small action – like a drop in the water - can have a big impact – as the waves grow wider and wider.

It is often used when speaking of influence. How one person's actions can have long lasting influence for generations afterwards.

The ripple effect.

The writer Victoria Moran said:

“The idea that everything is purposeful really changes the way you live. To think that everything that you do has a ripple effect, that every word that you speak, every action that you make affects other people and the planet.”

American politician Robert Kennedy said:

Each time a 'man' stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

So, are you a person of influence? And do you think you have the right to be?

In Rowan Williams' 5th chapter "Faith in Society" he speaks of the changes in society and asks what place our Christian discipleship has in a modern democratic society.

He talks about how for many, perhaps most, our personal beliefs are a private thing. And how we as a society take it for granted that people are free to believe and practice what they wish – so if people choose to believe and practice Christianity, or any other religion, that is their business. These are individual private matters and should not affect the way we act as public citizens.

And we live in a time when it is commonly thought to be unthinkable that the law should favour any one set of religious opinions – religion is respected but is not seen as belonging in the sphere of public decision-making and policy.

In this post Christian, multi faith world, religious authorities no longer have a place in the government of many countries – particularly ours.

What has become important has been the idea of human rights – each human individual is understood to have been born with an intrinsic claim to be treated with respect, possessed of a natural dignity and liberty that should be recognised by the law. A liberty to choose whatever makes one feel contented – as long as they don't bring harm to others. So a reasonable and fair society, says Williams, would be one in which each person's freedom to choose and to pursue their happiness was respected and each person was protected from being seriously disadvantaged by someone else exercising their freedom.

Based on this western society has developed to where government as a whole doesn't promote the values of any one philosophy or religion, except to affirm universal human rights to free choice; it doesn't favour any religious body, but it does allow the to exist as long as they don't threaten the way in which society overall carries on its business.

We see this at work here in South Australia where our government allows Christian chaplains (or pastoral care workers) to offer services in government schools – as long as they are not seen to be proselytising – attempting to convert people to the Christian faith. PCWs may or may not be able to share stories of our faith, like Easter and Christmas – depending on the views of their local School Principal and classroom teacher. So they work hard to gain trust so that they can create ripples of love and care.

Williams' names two particular concerns for living in a secular society like this:

The first is about fair distribution of resources. Damaging inequalities are going within particular societies and between different nations.

The second is a growing lack of motivation to serve the other – to act for the sake of others – or to value things that are not of immediate personal benefit. His concern is for the younger generations – on what will they base their moral priorities? What will motivate them to contribute to society and to care for the vulnerable?

Williams offers two principles of our Christian faith and discipleship that we can offer as a basis for a moral society:

We are each of equal value to God

And we are all dependent on each other

Williams believes that we cannot do without these two principles if we are ever to secure true justice and lasting peace and stability.

We are each of equal value to God:

For the Christian disciple, our human dignity – and therefore our human rights, depend on the recognition that every person is related to God before they are related to anything or anyone else. God has defined who we are and who we can be by God's own eternal purpose. We can choose to ignore God's call – or remain unaware of it – but God continues to call and to offer what we need to fulfil our calling.

So, when we face another person, we face someone else who is loved and being called by God. There is a spiritual dimension to their life that we cannot see – it is between them and God – a mystery.

When we encounter another person, we stand on holy ground, he says, because there is a dimension of their life that we cannot see – a dimension where they are uniquely called with their own set of capacities, gifts and possibilities.

So as Christian disciples, we may be committed to human rights and dignity – but it is because we can see this underlying reverence – or belovedness in others – rather than their legal entitlement.

It means that every person is needed for the good of all. No one person is ‘spare’ or superfluous.

It also means that every person is worth extravagant and lasting commitment. A human being deserves complete attention and care, whether rich or poor, whether they will live for a day or for 90 years.

Christian disciples understand that we are all dependent on each other:

In our reading today we heard about what happens when human beings are brought into relationship with Jesus by faith as a community in which everyone’s gifts are valued and set free for the service of others. The resources of each person are offered for every other, whether financial or spiritual or intellectual or administrative. This is the pattern of the Body of Christ that Paul describes.

Everyone has the dignity of possessing a gift and a purpose. Everyone is able to give to others. To have the dignity of being a giver and being important to someone else.

Are we open to discovering what gifts God has given each of us and what we can offer one another – and receive from one another?

So what can we do to create ripples and effect change in our society?

Williams says that the greatest public influence that can be exercised by Christian disciples is through the messages we give in the way we behave – messages that embody this radical respect we have for fellow human beings and for our dependence on one another. To show that we are all called to see others, and especially others in profound need, from the perspective of the eternal gracious love of God.

Where can we influence?

Each one of us has the capacity to create ripples of influence

We can do this in words and in actions.

Through our families:

As parents, grandparents, children and as neighbours

Through our workplace:

As teachers, managers, colleagues

And in dialogue with those we come in contact with in the coming weeks as we head towards a Federal Election.

Uniting church new document



Our church, the Uniting Church has recently released a resource to help us with this.

<https://uniting.church/visionstatement2019/>

Called “Our Vision for a Just Australia”, it includes a statement that expresses our hope for Australia as a just, compassionate and inclusive nation.



Let me read it to you:

We see a nation where each person and all creation can flourish and enjoy abundant life.

The Uniting Church in Australia believes the whole world is God's good creation.

Each person is made in God's image and is deeply loved by God. In Jesus, God is completing the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.

Our vision, grounded in the life and mission of Jesus, is for a nation which:

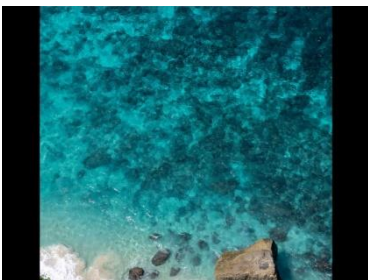
- is characterised by love for one another, of peace with justice, of healing and reconciliation, of welcome and inclusion.
- recognises the equality and dignity of each person.
- recognises sovereignty of First Peoples, has enshrined a First Peoples voice and is committed to truth telling about our history.
- takes seriously our responsibility to care for the whole of creation. is outward looking, a generous and compassionate contributor to a just world.

This vision is then expressed in 7 foundational areas:



A First People's Heart

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before colonisation, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian.
- First People's sovereignty is affirmed, First Peoples have a voice in the decision making of our country and are living out their right to self determination.
- As First and Second Peoples, we walk together, creating socially just and culturally safe relationships, listening and learning from one another.



Renewal of the Whole of Creation

- We seek the flourishing of the whole of God's Creation and all its creatures.
- We act to renew the earth from the damage done and stand in solidarity with people most impacted by human-induced climate change.
- Government, churches, businesses and the wider community work together for a sustainable future.



A Welcoming, Compassionate and Diverse Nation

- We are a nation of diverse cultures, languages, faiths, ethnic groups and experiences. We celebrate and value the strength of this diversity. We see this diversity reflected in our leaders, key decision makers, institutions, industry, sports and media. We are a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe – regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival.



An Economy for Life

- Our government makes economic decisions that put people first: decisions that are good for creation, that lift people out of poverty and fairly share our country's wealth. The economy serves the well-being and flourishing of all people.



An Inclusive and Equal Society

- We live together in a society where all are equal and free to exercise our rights equally, regardless of faith, cultural background, race, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. We defend those rights for all.



Flourishing Communities, Regional, Remote and Urban

- We live in communities where we are connected and we care for one another. In communities all over Australia, from our big cities to remote regions, we seek the well-being of each Australian and uplift those who are on the margins



Contributing to a Just and Peaceful World

- Australia acts with courage and conviction to build a just and peaceful world. We are a nation that works in partnership with other nations to dismantle the structural and historical causes of violence, injustice and inequality. Our government upholds human rights everywhere, acting in the best interests of all people and the planet



How's that for a vision for a just and moral society? For an Australia that we would be proud to call our home?

This resource goes much deeper, unpacking each of those 7 foundational areas, providing lots of information and discussion questions so that each of us can feel better equipped as we prepare to vote and talk with others about our Christian values. I commend it to you!

It is available online – I'll share links to it in next week's newsletter – or you can ask Sharyn to print out a hard copy for you.

Mother Teresa



So, what kind of ripple effect are you creating today?

Mother Teresa is quoted as saying:

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the water to create many ripples"

Nearly 20 years after her death, Mother Teresa is still creating ripples of love across our world because of her mercy for the poorest of the poor

Pope Francis said:

"How will you cast your stone across the waters to spread faith and light into the darkest corners of the communities you serve?

Even if you or your congregation alone cannot change the world, how can you still be hope that will welcome all into the circle of God's love? How can you smile and reach out even when you don't know their language or you are in pain yourself? How will you be a ripple of mercy this week?"¹

Each one of us has the capacity to create ripples of love and justice and mercy and hope, using the unique gifts that God has given us.

May God give us the courage to live out our Christian faith and values in our everyday lives.

Amen

¹ From <<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/blogs-commentaries/post/ripples-of-mercy>>