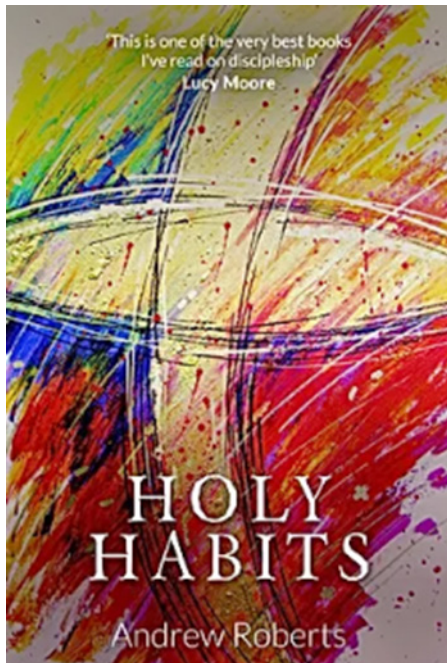


HOLY HABITS - WEEK 4



TO PREPARE

Begin with the prayer.

Use your notebook to write down answers in point form.

Work your way through the holy habit.

If you can, phone someone else and discuss and share your answers.

It's hard when we can't be physically together but we're trying to get zoom up and running for those who'd like to give it a go.

In the meantime, let's find creative ways to connect.

Enjoy!

HOLY HABITS PRAYER:

Gracious and ever-loving God, we offer our lives to you.

Help us always to be open to your Spirit in our thoughts and feelings and actions. Support us as we seek to learn more about those habits of the Christian life which, as we practise them,

will form in us the character of Jesus by establishing us in the way of faith, hope and love. Amen

RECAP:

Week 3 – Breaking bread and gladness and generosity

- Can you write some notes of what you appreciated from the previous 2 weeks and what you were challenged by?
- What do you think you can take with you in your discipleship journey?



HOLY HABITS WEEK 4 – BIBLICAL TEACHING

Text - Acts 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

ACTIVITY

How do you regard the Bible?

Is it a collection of stories, a historical document, a way of life, the word of God?

Remember there is no right or wrong answer, just your answer.

Write down all the different ways you have regarded the Bible through your life – have you changed your thinking?

Can you say how or why you have either stayed with your first understanding of the Bible or how you have changed?

READ – THE MINISTRY SHARED BY JESUS

From Holy Habits p118:

'The opening chapters of Acts present a continuum of ministry from Jesus through the apostles. Jesus had a teaching ministry which was rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. This is continued through those who were first identified as his disciples. Luke is not explicit about the content of the apostles' teaching in verse 42

but James Dunn argues that:

The apostles are the medium and the guarantors of the teaching focused on fresh interpretations of the Scriptures and beginning to order the memories of Jesus' teaching and ministry into forms suitable for instruction, worship and proclamation.'

Where do you agree with Andrew Roberts and where do you disagree?

Based on the evidence we have, how do you view Jesus' ministry?

Read – Biblical learning and teaching

From Holy Habits p119: a description of 6 key components of Biblical teaching:

- Relational
- Intentional (all members have a responsibility for learning)
- Mainly informal and life related
- Typically communal
- Reciprocal (learning is mutual and collaborative)
- Centrifugal in focus (disciples go out from community to be involved in service and mission and then return to reflect)

How does this affect our view of teaching and learning?

Who does it involve?

What does it mean to be a learning/teaching community of faith?

'Although some members may have a gift of teaching which they frequently use...all members of the community have a responsibility for enriching and contributing to the up-building of others. This is achieved in part by the exercise of their spiritual gifts and the example of their faithful, Christ-like living. Learning thus becomes a mutual, collaborative affair.'

How do you feel about this in the light of our own congregation?

What other experiences do you have that you can draw on (not including the previous churches that made up Manningham!)

Do you agree or disagree with this? Or are you unsure?

ACTIVITY - LINKS TO OTHER HOLY HABITS

We've now explored together several holy habits:

- Prayer
- Worship
- Fellowship
- Breaking of bread
- Gladness and generosity

Can you see any links with biblical teaching?

Try writing the habit 'biblical teaching' in the middle of the page and then around it add the headings of the habits above. Under each heading list some ideas of links eg, how can biblical teaching and breaking of bread be linked?

This could go on forever so a couple of answers for each will do!

READ - DIFFERENT WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH THE TEXTS

Holy Habits p121:

'When he was leading Sanctus 1 in Manchester, a pioneering minister Ben Edson told me about a young man who started coming along to some of their gatherings. Quite frankly he looked bored and disengaged with what was going on. Then at one session clay was brought in and members of the community were invited to engage with the biblical text they were exploring by sculpting their response. Now such an invitation would be my worst nightmare – I have the artistic skills of an inebriated orangutan – but this young man was extremely creative and loved sculpting. At the moment the Bible came alive for him and as he moulded the clay so the Spirit got to work in his life, breathing through the text he was engaged with.'

ACTIVITY

What do you know about fresh expressions of being church?

Can you name some examples and your experiences of them?

What does this story tell you and, importantly, how do YOU react to it?

Clay is not for everyone, messy church is not for everyone, neither are camps or events like Sacred Edge in Queenscliff and neither is a traditional form or preaching or sharing of the Word.

Draw a line on the page and for a moment forget church music and hymns/worship songs, just think about the sharing of the word, the message, the teaching and learning.

Imagine the line is a continuum with one end being a very traditional sermon sharing a message and the other end being a very active, intergenerational style of teaching/learning with stations.

Where do you place yourself remembering there are no right or wrong answers – we're just different.

Now think about whether or not you change depending on different situations and circumstances – can you identify what they are?

READ

Holy Habits p123:

'The Bible is not a book to be learnt by rote but a living story that we are invited to learn from, enter into and be shaped by so that we, in turn, may be God's agents of holiness and transformation in the world he loves.'

And from p124, quoting Robert Wicks:

'Scripture helps diminish the distance between God and us because we are part of the story. Ironically scriptures are not irrelevant because they were inspired and written in the past, rather they are eternally relevant because they help us see beyond our current frame of reference which may have trapped us.'

This is not the last word as this one subject is so huge and diverse. However, just ponder how you understand the Bible and how that influences the way you both learn and teach.

How can we as a church do this better?



HOLY HABITS – EATING TOGETHER

TEXT - ACTS 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

ACTIVITY

We know from last week that eating together and breaking bread are 2 different holy habits.

Hospitality has for many years been recognised as a missional activity, sharing what we have with others and talking and sharing our stories as we do. We can bond over food, we can learn so much about each other over food. Being together over meals is a domestic scene, a homely, nurturing experience. The early church met in each other's homes so that they could be together. It's sometimes called Table Fellowship.

What are your experiences of eating together? It would be interesting to hear stories from different parts of the world.

A TABLE FOR ALL?

Read Holy Habits p190:

'The atmosphere of the shared meals was one of gladness and the believers were characterised by their generous and sincere hearts. The word *aphelotes*

occurs here uniquely in the New Testament. It can be translated as either generous or sincere. When translated as sincere it indicates a purity or holiness in the Christian meals that contrasted with the sort of drunkenness of which the Pentecost community was accused in Acts 2:13'

The reality is that food is not always joyful. Let's think for a moment about when food is difficult to enjoy and doesn't bring gladness. (hint: food allergies)

How do we cope with this in our churches?

In the Judeo Christian tradition, eating together is a symbol of God's kingdom of plenty, enough for all. The psalms talk about cups overflowing, tables full of ripe fruits, and the gospels speak of the banquet of God.

Have a think back through some of those gospel stories of banquets and people people invited, parties being thrown – write down some examples and the main teaching/learning points eg the banquet thrown by the father for his son (prodigal son) – eternal love God has for creation.

What attracted people to the early church was how Christians treated each other eg all, no matter their station in life, came together to eat and pray and they looked after each other so they didn't go hungry. We know this from ancient authors like Josephus and Tertullian. However, we also know from Paul's letters that sometimes those who were working or were slaves arrived late to church meetings and missed out on the food so Paul had to actually tell the early church members to wait until they were all present before tucking in! Don't you just love that story.

ACTIVITY

Can you think of time Jesus ate with others – how did he show the inclusivity of God and the kingdom of God through the act of eating with others?

Think of different ways of being church that involve eating together – Messy Church, Alpha, café church, the Loving Church at Westfield Drive, communities like Iona. Some communities only use gluten free bread so that all can eat it, some only serve vegan food again, so that all can eat the same. Whatever the food allergy or the preference, it is catered for and everyone eats the same.

How does that sound? What does that say?

Is there the same relevance about eating together in Australia today?

How has our current situation made us reconsider eating together?

Some churches introduced shared meals in order to ensure no-one went hungry – 2000 years ago and still today.

What could this mean for us in Manningham?

NEVER fast if you have a medical condition!

So how can eating together become a spiritual discipline or holy habit for us? How can we overcome food allergies to ensure all are safe? Is it all too hard?

READ HOLY HABITS P193:

‘Eating together can also create safe space in which to share and deepen faith and to offer the invitation to explore the adventure of discipleship. At the meal table we can ask questions and share our stories, needs and struggles. We can celebrate life’s joys and rejoice together when we have seen prayers answered and the Kingdom come through our following of Jesus. Eating together also creates a place of belonging where koinonia can truly flourish. And the beauty is that this works in any culture.’

ACTIVITY

Have you experienced this idea of a safe space?

University chaplaincies and churches in uni towns are often very good at this with hungry students!

FASTING

Read Holy Habits p194

‘Fasting reminds us that we are sustained ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Matthew 4:4). In experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting.’

ACTIVITY

How can fasting draw us closer to God?

How can it connect us with the justice of food and hunger?

Can it become a rhythm of life?