

Call to Worship

But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. (Ps 59:16)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 38:1-15

Prayer of confession

Loving Heavenly Father,

You have called us your children and asked us to reach the world with your love.

Forgive us when our words and actions have been no different from those who claim no faith.

Forgive us when we have found it easier to lower our expectations than achieve your purpose in the power of your Spirit.

Forgive us when we have found it easier to stand still than walk with you; easier to comment than create new possibilities; easier to criticise than change things; easier to condemn than have compassion.

Forgive us in your grace. Restore us to your purpose; remind us of your truth and refresh us by your Spirit that we might live faithfully as your children. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

This is how God showed his love among us; He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn 4:9-10)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving Father,

thank you that you rule the world in truth and with righteousness.

Thank you: for faith which is not anxious for tomorrow; for faith to seek your kingdom and its righteousness; for faith to profit from suffering; for faith to do all things through Christ who strengthens us; for faith to persevere; for faith to stand for truth; for faith to love an enemy; for faith that dares to hope; for faith that you will bring all things to an end, in your time, in your way, and to your glory.

Amen.

Holy Communion

In the Jewish calendar, two major religious feasts were celebrated each year to acknowledge God's faithful provision for life. These festivals became times of harvest thanksgiving. The harvest of the first barley crop was celebrated at the feast of Passover and the harvest of the first wheat crop was celebrated at Pentecost.

However, both festivals originally celebrated the provision of life at a more spiritual level. The feast of Passover celebrated the time when the judgement of God passed harmlessly over the Hebrew people when the rest of the land was afflicted by plagues because the evil people had done. The second festival followed fifty days later. This was the feast of Pentecost which commemorated the Hebrew people arriving at Mt Sinai where they were given God's law, the commandments they were to live by which would ensure their survival.

Passover therefore represented God's judgement passing safely over people and Pentecost represented being told how to live rightly.

Both have direct parallels in the New Testament with Jesus dying at Passover, causing God's judgement to pass safely over people, followed by Pentecost, fifty days later, when God gave the church the gift of his Holy Spirit to empower our ministry and ensure the church lived rightly.

As we come together, at Jesus' request, to celebrate Holy Communion, we particularly do so to acknowledge the first of these two gifts, the gift of Jesus' death to pay the price for our sins so that we might have free access to God. The bread represents the body of Christ given to us that we might live ...and the wine represents the blood of Christ shed for us to pay the price for our sins. Let's share both together.

The Bible Reading

- Matthew 6:1-21

The Message: Being Authentic With God

In this passage, God is saying to us, "For goodness sake, be real with me."

God wants a real relationship – a relationship that is real even though God is, at the moment, necessarily hidden behind a veil of faith. He is seeking a relationship that prefigures God being fully with us (Rev 21:3 "*Now the dwelling of God is with his people.*")

The four most terrible words in Scripture are "*I never knew you*". Jesus warned:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Mt 7:21-23)

God loves us too much to settle for us merely having an outward form of piety that doesn't transform us on the inside and radicalise:

- our love for God
- our character, which we express in our actions.

Listen to what the God says through Isaiah the prophet in the Old Testament:

"The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD.

"I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me.

New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.

Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals, I hate with all my being.

They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. (Is 1:11-15)

And:

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?

Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

... "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with

shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Is 58:3-7)

And

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.

Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.

Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24)

God is looking for the 'real deal', "...for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?' declares the Lord" (Jer 30:21)

Matthew 6:1-21 compels us to take an honest look at our true motives in our dealings with God.

Jesus begins by saying *"be careful"*. We are to be careful because it is very easy to go wrong. It is very easy to be inauthentic and do good things with wrong motives. Jesus is extraordinarily jealous for us to have an authentic relationship with his heavenly father.

The three areas he wants us to be careful in are: 1) giving; 2) prayer; and 3) fasting.

Giving

In verse 2, Jesus essentially asks us this question. When you give to God's work, whose honour are you seeking? You see: if you give in an obvious way in order to be thought well of by others, that's precisely what will happen. The motive was to be thought well of by others. You gave. They thought well of you. Job done. Your motive was clear – and that was what was achieved. It's just that God was not in the equation. There was no transaction with God and therefore it will result in no Godly reward.

Jesus says that when you give; don't let the right hand know what your left hand is doing. In other words, keep your giving faithful and discreet, known in full only by God.

Prayer

The second issue Jesus addresses is the motive behind prayer.

Doing things for God in such a way that it results in praise from other people, is a trap we can easily fall into. It can even happen when we pray with other Christians.

Jesus speaks about “closing the door” and praying to God in secret. This does not mean we only pray when we are alone, as the Bible also speaks of the importance of praying when we meet together (Acts 1:14; Mt 18:19-20). However, most of our times of prayer will be when we are alone. The message is consistent. *Be real*. The motive you have in praying will determine your reward.

Then Jesus makes the point that Christians are called to pray in way that is quite different from those who do not know God. Most religions require its members to earn the right to speak to their god by:

- pious rituals
- continual repetition

In other words, they need to work quite hard to attract their god's attention and win enough favour to be heard. This is not so with Christians. The one true God is wanting us to speak to him and share his heart with us. He is not persuaded by repetition and rituals. God seeks intimacy with us and a love that is real.

Jesus points out that God is not dumb or hard of hearing. He knows what we want. The question this prompts, however is this: If God already knows what we want, why do we have to pray at all? The reason is this: God wants us to pray because prayer is the language of love; intimacy; sharing; togetherness and being fully alive in God.

Prayer is a real transaction with God, made possible because of his grace. Jesus then gives us an example of a prayer that is real. He teaches the Lord's Prayer. It essentially has three parts:

- First, focus on the person and qualities of God. That gets your head right.
- Second: seek God's agenda and will. That gets your perspective right.
- Third: seek what you need from God to do his will, particularly forgiveness from the failings and defeat of the past and spiritual protection for the future.

That's it. That's what authentic prayer looks like.

Jesus then has a little aside in which he says that your authentic transaction with God (through prayer) must have relevance to how you live. In particular, it means you, who have sought God's forgiveness of the past, must also forgive others what has happened in the past.

Fasting

Finally, Jesus talks about fasting

Don't advertise the fact that you are fasting, or you will simply get the reward you hoped for – the admiration of others, and nothing more.

When you fast (note: not 'if'), look as if you are not fasting. In other words, live the joy of fasting, not the misery of self-denial. If you are miserable, then who is centre stage of your feelings. It is self. So, live the joy of fasting, don't display the misery of self-denial. Get it God-centred.

In summary

Verses 19-21 give a summary of the principle Jesus is wanting to teach. It is this: Where are you investing? What will last?

And what does winning really look like?

One of the greatest studies on success is contained in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. In this book, the writer (the Teacher) reflects on the folly of doing anything excessively in the belief that lasting satisfaction will be gained from it. The Teacher understands that the requirements necessary for any of us to feel successful are illusive. The eye never has enough of seeing (1:8; 6:7) and no one ever feels they ever have enough (5:10). He warns that the things people strive for in order to find satisfaction are as meaningless as “*chasing the wind*” (1:14; 2:11; 4:4). Certainly, the goals that we set to define ourselves as being ‘a success’ tend to be continually revised so that they retreat like a mirage before us and are never attained.

Where is ultimate joy to be found?

I invite you seek an authentic relationship with God which will allow you to ‘key in’ to his agenda... and find real joy.

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor 1:21-22)

This service was provided to HopeNet SA by Dr Nick Hawkes

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

My battle with me!

Romans 7:15-25

Organise two captains of two teams and have a simple relay race involving navigating obstacles, or throwing a ball into a basket (anything interesting). Afterwards, give the captain of the winning team a small bag of jelly babies and have a short break.

Be careful not to set the captains up for failure or for public ridicule but watch what the captain does. Does the captain share the jelly babies with the rest of the team?

Use this as a jumping off point to talk about how hard it is sometimes to do the right thing. Ask the children if they have you ever done something you knew you shouldn't do? (Share an example from your own life when you did something you know you shouldn't have.) Go on to say, "Be honest, sometimes it hard to do the right thing." Then go on to teach that God understands (Hebrews 4:15). The Bible it says that even God's evangelist Paul struggled to do the right thing. (Read Romans 7:15-25)

Ask the children to notice that Paul ends his talk about the difficulty he has in doing the right thing by saying, "Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v.25)? Ask why do they suppose he says this? Go on to teach that Paul says this because he can enjoy:

- 1) God's forgiveness when we do things wrong (1 Peter 3:18; Romans 6:23)
- 2) Gods' strength to help us do the right thing when we are tempted (Hebrews 2:18; 2 Peter 2:3-4).

Go on to teach that if we ever do the wrong thing, we must never give up. Know that God loves you, ask for God's forgiveness, and get on with life trying to do better next time in the strength that Christ gives you in your heart.