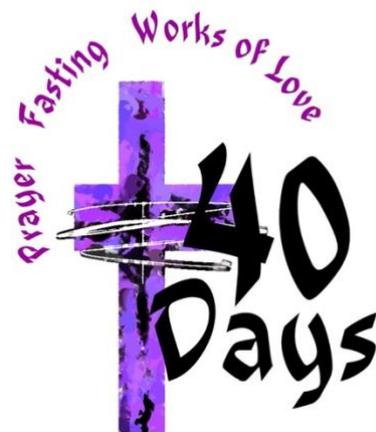


LENT

The Commands of Christ



INTRODUCTION

When the children of Israel ate their first Passover meal and followed God out of Egypt, he drew them to Mount Sinai and gave them the gift of the Law – what we know as the Ten Commandments.

His strange gift was a series of rules on how they must act! We don't imagine anyone would be thankful for a list of rules as a birthday present.

But gift it was, because the people of Israel had never been a nation before. They'd been slaves and a hotch-potch of families and had had neither power nor responsibility to rule themselves. So, one of God's first acts involved helping them work out how to live well together in the world they were going to.

Similarly, we are invited to be "born again" – to start a new life with God and each other in a world that isn't always helpful to faithful people.

What, therefore, are our rules, our law? What are the commands that shape us as we follow Jesus?

This Lent we are going to think about five commands of Jesus which are a foundation for living as a new people under God.

They are:

Week 1: Follow me and I will make you ...

Week 2: Love God, Love your Neighbour

Week 3: This is how you should pray

Week 4: Go into all the world

Week 5: Take, Eat. Drink this.

May God bless you as you seek the resurrected Christ at Easter.

Week 1

FOLLOW ME AND I WILL MAKE YOU

Jot down a bunch of words that spring to mind when you think about following Jesus:

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 4: 18-22

Matthew 19:16-22

Matthew 16:21-28

QUESTIONS

- If Jesus made fishermen “*fishers of men*”, what are you, and what might you become when you follow Jesus?
- The disciples followed “*immediately*”, but most of us don’t. What has your timeline for following been?
- The rich man in Matthew 19 was a good man but held back from following. Why? What holds you back?
- In Matthew 16 Jesus connects his journey to the cross with the disciples’ calling to follow. What is Jesus talking about?
- What might this mean for us?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What has stood out for you about these reflections on the Bible?

DEVELOPING OUR “FOLLOWING”

Everybody’s “discipleship” of Jesus will be different. We all have different gifts, inclinations, and weaknesses. Have a think about the following questions:

What is in your Heart?

When you take time to think or pray about the world you are in, what is it that concerns you most? Is there a corner where God speaks?

What’s in your Hands?

What abilities and resources do you have? What abilities do you wish you had?

What part of you do you know you’ve neglected?

What’s in your Reach?

What responsibilities do you have that limit what you can do?

What would you change about your life if you could?

Where is the whisper of God in your thinking?

ACTIONS

Describe the top three ways you want to grow as a follower:

1

2

3

3

Week 2

LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Jot down a bunch of words that spring to mind when you think about loving:

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 22: 34-40

1 John 4:19-21

Psalm 1

QUESTIONS

- In Matthew 22 we hear about the greatest commandments. What do they mean?
- In 1 John 4 the two commandments are connected. How, and why?
- Psalm 1 suggests our lives and their impact will be different depending on our obedience to the law of God. Why is this? Why does it matter for us?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What has stood out for you about these reflections on the Bible?

DEVELOPING IN LOVE

As we reflect on Jesus' command to love, we are confronted with ideas of sacrifice, loss, and difficulty. At the same time, we are told that we gain more even as we endure loss.

What are your experiences of loss and gain through love?

What happens to us if we ignore these commands?

Where will God help us?

ACTIONS

Decide on the top three ways you will seek to live in love:

1

2

3

Week 3

THIS IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY

Jot down a bunch of words that spring to mind when you think about prayer:

BIBLE READINGS

1 Timothy 2:1-7 Matthew 6:5-13 James 4:1-4

QUESTIONS

- 1 Timothy urges us to prayer. Who for, and why?
- Why do you think the writer to Timothy jumps from our prayer (vs 1-4) to Jesus the mediator (vs 5-7)?
- List the features of how Jesus expect us to pray from Matthew? What is his thinking?
- What does Jesus' invite us to focus on in our prayer?
- How might this change what we expect from God when we pray?
- What would James say about how we should pray? What is his concern? Why?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What has stood out for you about these reflections on the Bible?

DEVELOPING PRAYER.

It seems that prayer is less about what we want God to do for us and more about how we join in with the work of God. Consequently our task is to make prayer a part of our journeying with Jesus.

One suggestion is silence. As Mother Teresa said, *“God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer”*.

This is hard, because the noise of our spirits drowns out the quietness of God.

How might you give more space for God when you are in prayer?

ACTIONS

Decide on the top three ways you will try to develop prayer:

1

2

3

Week 4

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD

Jot down a bunch of words that spring to mind when you think about God's relationship with the world:

BIBLE READINGS

John 10:7-16

Matthew 28:16-20

Ephesians 4:11-16

QUESTIONS

- In John, Jesus talks about *other sheep* that he wants to bring into his flock. How do we as fellow sheep help or hinder this work?
- In Matthew, what does Jesus mean by "*make disciples*"?
- What is the difference between going to church and being a disciple?
- In Ephesians the writer describes a whole load of roles. What are they, and what are they for?
- Are there other gifts that contribute to this work?
- What is the ultimate aim of all this work? (vs 16)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What has stood out for you about these reflections on the Bible?

HOW WILL YOU “GO”?

Jesus talks about loving our neighbour, and invites us to “go”. Sometimes that calling takes us far from the life we expected to live, and sometimes we stay where we are, but somehow find ways to “go” on behalf of Jesus.

Both choices are hard in different ways – if we stay where we are, we remain connected to loved communities but might risk people thinking we are odd if we have Jesus on our mind. Perhaps easier is leaving our current life, but when we do that we constantly stretch and sever enriching relationships.

Either way, Christ’s calling is costly. He tells us there is always a “cross” to carry when we follow him.

But called we are whether we like it or not.

How are you called?

ACTIONS

Consider three ways you will respond to Christ’s calling:

1

2

3

9

Week 5

TAKE EAT

Jot down a bunch of words that spring to mind when you think about Holy Communion:

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 26:26-29

Matthew 27:45-51

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

QUESTIONS

- what might be the significance of Jesus saying he “*will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom*” (Matt 26:29) and the moment of his death where he is given sour wine to drink (Matt 29:48-50)?
- what does Jesus mean when he says “*this is my blood of the covenant*” (Matt 26:28)?
- what is the connection between our *conduct* and our *participation in communion* according to Paul (1 Cor 11:23 ff)?
- Holy Communion has extremely high status in our church. How do you feel about it? Why is that? What would help you feel more connected to God in it?

REFLECTION

Holy Communion is recognised as a “sacrament” by the church – a *“visible sign of invisible grace”*. When we read Scripture, we see Jesus taking the Jewish Passover meal – the commemoration of their exit from Egypt – and giving it new meaning by linking it with his death on the cross. In Jesus’ Passover he becomes the sacrificial lamb, and the cross becomes one of the final “cups” he is to drink in completing the Passover meal.

Consequently, by integrating his death with the Last Supper Jesus changes the meaning of his execution from barbaric injustice to God’s salvation.

We join in that meal as we celebrate communion, and in so doing are connected with the living God’s gracious act of self-sacrifice. Holy Communion is thus a holy communing with the act of God.

Easter is therefore our most holy time of the year, where we pay particular attention to Jesus’ call to *“take, eat”* and *“drink this, all of you”*. In this we are given the hint that the Christian life is not simply to receive, but to join in the journey of Christ and to carry our own cross. Communion is therefore the recognition we are participants *with* God in his work in the world. Our obedience to Jesus’ commands not just an act of compliance but an act of participation in the life and action of God.

This becomes the rich reality we are called to, the one that transforms mere church-going and believing into being *“the salt of the earth ... a light on a hill”*. It also transforms our sufferings, giving them divine meaning beyond the simple cycle of life and death.

ACTIONS

How will you engage more deeply with the sacrament of Holy Communion?

1

2

3

ENTERING HOLY WEEK

As you enter Holy Week, try and summarise the differences and decisions you have seen and made during Lent.

Collect for Easter Day

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit
be praise and honour, glory and might,
now and in all eternity.