

Lincoln Methodist Circuit

Lectionary 2017/18

“Holy Habits”

A series on discipleship

based on the book by Andrew Roberts

Notes for Preachers

Quarter 3

March - May

Introduction

We hope you have found the material so far helpful especially as we launched out into the Holy Habits themselves. As this is being written on January 25th no-one will yet have had experience of the “practical” material for churches to work on for Sunday services instead of a conventional sermon we have not had any feedback we can incorporate into the Q3 notes: please let us have it and ask churches to pass it on as well to ian35@yahoo.co.uk If necessary we could then put out further suggestions for subsequent “practicals” later in Q3.

If you count the habits covered, you will see that there appear to be fewer of them than in the book! This is because it seemed appropriate to combine “eating together” and “breaking bread”. Acts 2 v42-47 mentions breaking bread twice, once in the context of teaching, fellowship and prayer and again “in people’s homes, eating together”, suggesting the former is what we would now call Communion and the other is a particular way of doing fellowship. Of course, Passover itself was and is a family meal. The dates given will be modified for individual churches to meet the overall needs of the plan

We have also put “giving “in with “gladness and generosity”. The CLT may decide to suggest combining the “practical” with the theory by having a special collection. We are suggesting to the CLT that one purpose of this would be to provide a circuit fund to help those churches who decide to do something special in terms of the ‘practical making more disciples” in Q4, such as inviting people to a community BBQ to share the good news and who might find it hard to fund this themselves. This is very much the spirit of 2 Corinthians 9 and will be a way to develop circuit as a Holy Habitat!

As usual each session has group material attached: this is rather less detailed for the group sessions linked to the “practicals”. We hope this will encourage groups to take responsibility for their own planning and develop the ideas they have worked on as a congregation in say, different types of prayer. However during Lent the CLT is encouraging the use of “40 Stories of Hope – how faith has changed prisoners’ lives” which combines the stories of prisoners and ex-prisoners with study and reflection on the difference Jesus makes in even the most humanly hopeless situations. So churches and groups will have a choice and in any case the group material may be an extra resource for your preaching preparation.

We have included the “practical” on reading the Bible for completeness though we did include it in the Q2 material. There is also a background piece on “Giving in the Bible” to give additional material for “Gladness, Generosity and Gving”. We also include the Q4 grid at the end: as you see we plan to end the series with a Circuit service at the beginning of July before school holidays.

As we have said before these notes are meant to be to help you in preparation, not a definitive set of sermon outlines. If you have comments or suggestions, please let us know by email or at the next LP meeting. We know we have not got everything right although we have had feedback that many preachers and congregations have found the series helpful. May you know much blessing as you work on preparation. Our prayer is that we may all grown not only in knowledge of the truth but in our daily discipleship walk in it.

Tim Hirst)
Ian Lacy)
Chris Marsh) “The team”
David Sheehan)
David Stubbs)

Q3 Holy Habits Programme

	Theme	Holy Habits chapter	Possible readings
March 4th Lent	Reading the Bible 2 - practice (congregation/worship leader)	9	Nehemiah c7 v73b – c8v 8 Luke c4 v16-21 2 Timothy c3 v12-17
March 11 th Mothering Sunday	Eating together and Breaking of Bread - minister (as this will presumably be a communion service it will be either 11 th , 18 th or 25 th)	10,14	Isaiah c25 v6-8 John c2 v1-11 Luke c22 v13-23 1 Corinthians 11 v23-29
March 18th Lent 5	“free choice” (LP)		
March 25 Lent 6 Palm Sunday	“free choice” (LP)		
April 1 Easter	“free choice” (either)		
April 8th	Prayer 1 (either)	11	Jeremiah c29 v12-14 John c15 v4-8 Colossians c1 v9-13
April 15th	Prayer 2 – practice (can be lead by congregation/worship leader so could be OA)	11	1 Kings c8 v22-24 and 27-30 John c17 v20-26 Philippians c1 v9-11
April 22nd	Service	16	Deuteronomy c10 v17-19 Matthew c25 v 31-46 1 Corinthians 12 v1-7, 27-31
April 29th	Service 2 -practice (can be lead by congregation/worship leader so could be OA)	16	Genesis c12 v1-3 Matthew c5 v13-16 Ephesians c2 v4- 10
May 6th	“free choice” either or OA		
May 13 th	Gladness, generosity and giving (ether)		Deuteronomy c15 v7-11 Acts c2 v44-47 2 Corinthians c9 v1-15
May 20 th Pentecost	“free choice” -	12	
May 27 th Trinity Sunday	‘free choice” (or OA)	12	

People have asked for lectionary readings, so we have included the main readings for “Holy Habits”

The dates for “Hoy Habits” services are nominal in that different churches will have particular services on different days depending on availability of preachers, having a minister available for communion services etc.

March 4th

Church Material and Ideas for “Reading the Bible 2 – Practical” (Holy Habits c8).

(previously circulated with the “Quarter 2 part 2” notes)

Notes and ideas for churches

- 1) The idea is to explore and develop the teaching and ideas on the nature and importance of the Bible that were shared in the “theory” section in a previous week. The aim is to get us all excited that we can actually get to hear God speaking through his words/Word and that it will change our lives!
- 2) There are all sorts of ideas you could try –here are some.
 - a) Organise a groups or individuals in advance in advance to read a short passage from each of the “genres” of the Bible:
 - Beginnings and the Law – (first 5 books)
 - History
 - Poetry and wisdom
 - Prophecy
 - Gospels
 - Church history and letters
 - Prophecy (Revelation- technically “Apocalypse”)

You could perhaps look at modern equivalents to show how the Bible’ structure still resonates today.

- b) Or take the big themes
 - creation in Genesis 1-2
 - Fall and rebellion= Genesis 3
 - Incarnation
 - Redemption
 - Consummation – a new beginning – Revelation
- 3) Perhaps practical activities as well such as
 - Group memorisation of a verse
 - Demonstrating how we can meditate on a verse (read it several times – break into phrases - what do they say to me? – into words – when I say “faith, what does it mean? – turn it into prayer

Group material for “Reading the Bible 2 -practical”

Many groups across the circuit will be using the Lent series from “40 Stores of Hope – How faith has changed prisoner’s lives” so we have not produced specific material to follow up the “practical” service on “Reading the Bible”. However if you are not using “40 stories” then perhaps one or more of the following would be good

- You could work through ideas that were not covered in the practical session.
- You could take a passage – say Matthew c7 v24 -25 – and apply the “Scripture Union “approach to it.
 - Worship
 - What is this passage basically about?
 - What does it say about God?
 - What does it say about his world -and me?
 - Is there an error to avoid?
 - Is there a truth to believe?
 - What difference could the passage make to my/our life?
 - What am I /are we going to do about it?
 - Prayer
- Read a long unfamiliar narrative passage (perhaps from the OT in a modern translation. Jeremiah 36 is a possibility - you could always alter the obscure names to modern ones beginning with the same letter!) as you would any other book, perhaps out loud with different people taking on different characters (or listen to someone reading it on a DVD). Then discuss what light the passage may throw on current situations we face – in the church, society, our own lives. How relevant id God’s word today
- Share a verse or passage that has meant a lot to you. Why did you know it was God’s word to you and what difference did it make?

March 11th (Mothering Sunday)

“Breaking Bread and Eating Together” (“Holy Habits” c10 and 14)

It seemed appropriate that this should include Communion as “practical” and therefore the ministers will take responsibility for this one: they are better qualified to put the material together than the Holy Habits team! It may be an opportunity to have communion in a different way or even combine it with a meal together.

As there are more churches than ministers it will take several weeks to cover the topic across the circuit so the grid shows two “own choice” Sundays including Palm Sunday. So if you are taking a Mothering Sunday service you will be able to work with the church in the way that is best for all concerned.

Easter Sunday is of course outside the series (even though it is the basis of all we are as disciples), so the next Holy Habits date is April 8th.

We have not included any group material for this topic.

March 18th – “Own choice”) see comment above

March 25th – “Own choice”)

April 1st - Easter

April 8th

Preaching notes for “Holy Habits – Prayer 1” (c 11)

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2 :42”

“Prayer – secret, fervent, believing prayer – lies at the root of all personal godliness.”

William Carey

Aim: To understand how the Holy Habit of Prayer enables us to live in God’s presence.

Content:

What is Prayer?

Why do we pray?

What different ways do we pray?

When can we pray?

Readings: (see below for these and other passages in full)

OT: Jeremiah 29:12–14

Gospels: John 15:4–8

Epistles: Colossians 1:9–13

Some thoughts about content and progression to act as help (not a blueprint!)

Start by reminding everyone that prayer is the expression of our relationship with God through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are several different purposes for prayer; in prayer we can express our praise and adoration of God, our thankfulness for what he has done, our confession of the ways in which we have not lived for him and bring before him our requests for assistance.

There are many contexts for prayer too. As well as formal prayers in a church, there are also prayers in a family or small group, simple personal prayers in a Quiet Time or even “arrow prayers” when we need God’s help as we’re going about our daily work or activities.

In the book Holy Habits Andrew Roberts says “True prayer is so much more than something we do occasionally or regularly. Prayer is the spiritual air we breathe. We breathe in the grace, blessings, peace, courage, holiness of God and breathe out our adoration, praise, thanksgiving, confession and intercession. Prayer is an adventure in itself. In prayer we soar and struggle, wonder and worry. When we pray we can experience ecstasy and anguish, clarity and confusion. We encounter mystery and silence. When we run out of words the Spirit breathes out and prays through our groans and sighs.”

You might want to give examples of times in the Bible where prayer was crucial (Hannah, who prayed for a child (1 Samuel 1:20), Elijah, praying for drought and rain (James 5:17-18), Jesus praying in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42-44)

You may also want to give examples from your own life of when prayer has been important to you, and if you're with a congregation who are confident, then why not ask for testimony from the congregation of times they have seen answers to prayer or what kinds or styles of prayer they find particularly important.

In John 15:4–5 Jesus says, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.’” Prayer is our main way of “remaining” in Jesus, involving him in each moment of our daily lives.

The early church's life was saturated with Prayer (read some of Paul's prayers from the passages listed below). Is that how we would describe our own lives? If not maybe we need to think about how we can incorporate prayer more into our daily life and see what a difference it can make to us.

Idea for Creative worship:

There is lots of scope for trying different styles of prayer: Visual cues (PowerPoint/video) audio reflection (music), tactile aids (holding crosses, smooth stones to represent prayed-for people)

Try a different type of intercessory prayer in the service.

Take an inflatable globe or a world map, and some post-it notes and pens and have congregation write their prayers and stick them on the map.

and/or

Use up to date information from All We Can (MRDF) <http://allwecan.org.uk>, Christian Aid <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/> or Tearfund <https://www.tearfund.org/> to give background before praying.

Passages on prayer

Psalm 27: 4 “One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple”.

Psalm 121:1–2 I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? 2
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Galatians 4:6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘*Abba*, Father.’

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and

petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Ephesians
1:16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Ephesians
6:18–20 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Colossians
1:9–13 9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
(this is a great basis for praying for other Christians when you have little or no "hard information" e.g. someone in prison for their faith)

Ephesians
6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

John 15:4–5 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Group material for “Holy Habits – Prayer1”

Icebreaker: Are you someone who finds prayer easy or difficult? Share with the group what styles of prayer you’ve come across, and which ones are most precious to you.

Bible Study

Look at John 15:4-5

How does prayer help us to “remain” in Jesus?

What does Jesus say about what happens if we don’t “remain” in him?

Does this ring true in your own experience?

Look at Ephesians 6:18

What is praying “in the Spirit”?

How can we pray “on all occasions”?

Note how the passage speaks of “all kinds of prayers and requests”. Do we sometimes become limited in the ways we pray?

Look at Colossians 1:9–13

Imagine Paul is praying this prayer over your small group. How does it make you feel? What do you find particularly encouraging in this prayer?

It is good to have people praying for us. Can you think of people in your own past or present who have prayed for you? Who can we bless by praying for them? Who do you feel needs the encouragement of being prayed for?

Prayer

If possible have some “tactile” aids to prayer (stones to represent prayers; wooden cross to hold or look at, prints of artwork (from the Methodist art collection for example), some written prayers (the methodist prayer handbook, or any other book of prayers).

April 15th

Church material and ideas for “Prayer 2 – Practical” (Holy Habits c 11)

Introduction

“We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it.”

Mr Squeers in “Nicholas Nickleby” – Charles Dickens

Although Mr Squeers is not someone we would describe as a good teacher he does make the point that theoretical knowledge needs to be put into practice. As Andrew Robert’s “Holy Habits” makes clear discipleship is “learning by doing” and that is especially true of prayer. In fact, it is only as we pray that we begin to discover what it is and the difference it makes. A week or so ago we looked at the “what, when and why” of prayer. This week we will look together at the “how” by “go and do it”, working with each other as an intentional praying community.

What follows are ideas and suggestions for a service based on praying: they are not guidelines, let alone a prescription to follow. As a community you will have between you a wide experience of different sorts of prayer and far more ideas than we have been able to come up with.

Planning

However, the church will have to do some advance planning (“Lord, teach us to pray”) if this is to work well: you could see it as an Own Arrangement focussed on prayer and as it is not intended to include specific preaching you will not have to have a LP present, though the leader/coordinator will of course need to put in a bit of explanation and leading. You might decide to have “prayer practice” where the sermon would usually be, or you might decide to have different sorts of prayer done in different ways throughout the service, with prayer themed hymns and songs between them.

Ideas

Exploring different “categories” of prayer

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Petition _ praying for ourselves (individually and as a church/discipleship community)
- Intercession – praying for others (family, friends, our local community, country, world)

Exploring different “words” of prayer

- Written prayers (e.g. The Methodist Worship Book, The Lion Prayer Collection)
- Responsive prayer
- Extempore prayer
- Silent prayer

- Written prayers – read out, pinned up. Or perhaps “letters to God”
- Prayers in the Bible

Exploring different “styles” of prayer (perhaps with prayer stations” to move between)

- ‘tactile” prayer – using physical objects as symbols and aids to focus – stones, cloth, wood, water
- Candles
- Taize – repetitive simple melodies and words
- Celtic - focus on God in creation, his all-pervading presence (see Davis Adam’s books such as ‘The Open Gate” published by Triangle and available from eden.co.uk)
- Prayer trees- to hang thanksgiving and requests on.
- Pictures- to stimulate imagination and inspiration (remember the Methodist Modern Art exhibition>)
- Photographs, newspapers, video clips of particular contemporary situations that need prayer
- Some hymns are prayers in themselves or focus on prayer – e.g. 517-531 in Singing the Faith or Hymns and Psalms 484-574 which works through the “categories”

Exploring different “postures” of prayer

- Sitting
- Kneeling
- Standing
- Walking
- Outdoors
- Eyes open -or closed.

And of course, you can “mix and match” – silent intercession for refugees whilst focussing on a picture of “The flight into Egypt” whilst listening to the Taize “O Lord, hear my prayer”.

This only scrapes the surface. If you went to “Stepping Out” at Burton Rd on Jan 31st you will probably have come away with even more ideas to add to your own. Some ideas may not “work” for individuals or the church as a whole, some may surprise you so you want to use them again. The important thing is that we are speaking to God – and he loves us to do that: it shows we are responding to his speaking to us.

Group material for “Holy Habits – Prayer 2- practical”

We have not written detailed notes for this session. The group leader will probably find it helpful to have the “Church Materials and Ideas” for the practical session on prayer.

Unless you spent all day in church it is unlikely you covered the whole range of possibilities! Discuss the church session on practical prayer:

- What went well?
- What would you like to try again?
- Was any style of prayer unhelpful for you? Why?
- What ideas would you like to try that you didn't have time for on Sunday? – Go ahead!
- What other ideas do you have that have not been mentioned?
- What personally do you find hard/helpful when you pray? Share with each other.
- Does your group have a prayer journal -things you pray for - with space to record the answers?
- Think about what “pray without ceasing” might mean in practical terms on your life.

Pray!

April 22nd

Preaching Notes for “Holy Habits – Service 1” (chapter 13)

Aim: To Nurture Discipleship

Content: Intentional development of the habits of discipleship by deliberately providing and/or putting ourselves in, the right places to develop our faith, and grow as Christians.

Possible readings

OT: Deuteronomy c10 v17-19

Gospels: Matthew c25 v31-46

NT: 1 Corinthians c12 v1-5,27-31

Other passages that may be useful: Matthew c20 v20-28; Luke c14 v1-14; Luke c17 v11-19
Acts c2 v41-47; Romans c12 v9-19

Jesus Himself pointed out to His disciples that He came, not to **be** served, but to serve.

He also reminded them that a servant is not greater than their master.

We are called to be involved in the Kingdom work of making disciples of all nations. We are expected to do so by following His example!

On pages 175 and 176 of the Holy Habits book, there is a moving poem, written by someone who was the recipient of loving, non-judgmental, costly (in terms of time and effort, if nothing else) service which shows what an impact it made on them.

Is “service” one of the hallmarks of **our** discipleship?

We are not called to serve just for the sake of service! We are meant to be involved in Christ’s continuing work of rescuing the perishing, and the service we offer is just a **part** of our mission to give testimony to the claims of our Lord. As His disciples, we are to offer distinctively **Christian** service. We need to be careful not to leave Him out of what we say and do, as we serve. As we serve, it is His presence that will transform **us**, our **service** and potentially, the lives of **those** we serve. We are **not** just another social service!

The gladness and generosity of the new converts mentioned in Acts 2, spilled out beyond the confines of their own group, to touch the lives of everyone around them. No wonder that they enjoyed “the goodwill of all the people” nor that “each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.”

How do our churches serve the communities in which God has placed us?

How do we relate to the people around us?

We are called to live **in** the world, but not to be part **of** it. Do we make efforts to live **in** the world of the people we try to win for Christ through our service? How? Or do we try to make **them** live in ours?

In Chapter 6 of Holy Habits - "Holy Habitats" – mention is made of the church called "Somewhere Else", and the way in which they engaged with the community around them.

How well do we know the needs of the people who live in our neighbourhoods?

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines hospitality as "the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests or visitors."

Could the offering of hospitality be a part of the service we offer to the people around us? How?

It often (but not always) involves eating together.

If we do choose to employ this means of outreach, we need to ensure that whilst it must be loving and distinctively Christian, it is never coercive. How, and whether people choose to respond to Jesus is between them and Him, not us! Not everyone who received good gifts from Him, responded to Him with gratitude. In fact, the **majority** didn't! (Luke 17 v11-19),

If many chose to ignore or reject His offering whilst He lived on the Earth, we need not be discouraged if we meet with the same response.

Jesus had (and has) a particular concern for the poor and society's outcasts. Single parent families, the unemployed, the homeless, drug addicts, prostitutes, ex-prisoners. Can we find a way to serve and share His love with these groups of people?

An idea for Creative activity:

There is quite a good monologue about the Sheep and The Goats attached to this information sheet. It is also available at https://www.dramatix.org.nz/archive/Walk/sheep_and_goats.html

It is thought provoking but quite long and might be useful for a member of the congregation with a gift for dramatic to read, rather than doing it yourself.

The author has granted permission for it to be performed, free of charge, on condition that users let him know how and where it is used. He can be contacted at: jamhat@mts.net

Other:

In all weeks we need to reference back to Circuit vision as appropriate.

Monologue - Sheep and Goats

By Jim Hatherly

Summary

A monologue based on Matthew 25:31-46, in which the narrator ponders what qualifies a person to be a "sheep" as opposed to a "goat".

Scripture

Matthew 25: 31-46

Script

Sheep. Goats. Sheep. Goats. Sheep. Goats.

Now, which one am I?

Honestly, it is not an easy thing to figure out. Ever since I went to that darn Bible study the other day, I have been hopelessly confused. I thought Jesus was supposed to make things easier, and not more confusing. These darn parables!

You see, it's like this. I went to the Bible study hoping to find the key to eternal life. The right path to walk, you know.

I even brought along my Mom's old King James Bible. I figured, heck, if that was the one she used, and she was a very god-fearing and righteous woman, then surely her Bible would put me in good stead with the big You-Know-Who.

You know what? It didn't help a bit. So, I asked this nice woman next to me if I could share hers and she said that was OK. She told me the language would be less confusing. Good, I thought. Now we were getting somewhere.

What they were studying turned out to be a lesson about sheep and goats. Go figure. I thought Jesus was a carpenter. You know, straight lines and cut off points, angles and design. A draft of what the reign of God was like. Do this, follow that blueprint. Got it make. - wrong!

He tells this parable about people who come before the throne of God at the last day and they line up and God is there as some kind of shepherd. And God is doing this separating thing with the animals. Sheep (those are the good guys in the story) over here. Goats (you guessed it, the ones who did everything wrong) over there.

OK fine, so God is a shepherd. I can live with that.

Anyway it turns out there is a big test. It has to do with what you did with your life. And how you lived out your faith. Cool, I thought. I was always pretty good at tests in school. I'll try this one out.

But here's how the test goes... God is incognito. I had to look that one up. It means God is invisible. Like we didn't know that, right? But not only is God invisible, but God is hiding, sort of, in other people. Now that's cool, too. Neat approach.

But where? Here's the secret. Seems God is hiding in places you'd never expect. And not only that, but you have to find God and do something. I figured, heck, this is like a big scavenger hunt. Go find God, do something, and check off your list. Then you're in.

Just in case you don't know, I'll let you in on the clues...

I was hungry and you gave me food, God says.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

I was naked and you clothed me.

I was sick and you took care of me.

I was in prison and you visited me.

So, when I got home I jotted down the list. Then I went out and started the big scavenger hunt. I figured I should be done in no time, then I could just coast.

First item on the list - God is hungry. Feed God. So I went to the store and bought a can of beans and looked for someone to give it to, hoping like blazes that I wasn't going to waste it on someone who wasn't God. Or Jesus. Well, you know what I mean.

I went downtown and hung around a soup kitchen for a while. And I'll tell you, I did not find God. Lots of people, but for goodness sake they were already feeding each other. They had food, sandwiches and soup and coffee. Some of the people who had finished their meal were getting up and helping behind the counter, serving others in line. They even asked me if I wanted to have some lunch, or to help feed the others. Nope, I figured, I was just wasting my time. No sign of God there. I went home and ate the beans. Next item - God is thirsty. Give drink. After I finished my beans I went to find someone to water. This was extremely difficult. I walked up and down Henderson Highway for an hour holding a glass of water in my hand, looking for God. No takers. Finally, I went to Tim Horton's to get a cup of coffee. God wasn't there, either.

But I did notice a strange thing. This woman came in, anxious, worried, like something really bad had happened. The clerk behind the counter starts talking with her. She told her that she needed to hang in there. That things would get better. She told the woman that she would pray for her. And then, get this, she took a loonie out of her own purse and bought the woman a cup of coffee. Go figure. I mean those clerks don't get much of a salary there. Just wasting her salary, as far as I could see. Anyway, I didn't find God.

I reckoned I wasn't doing so well on this list. I took the bus home and sat beside this stranger. Sort of an odd-looking fellow. He kept mumbling about how unfriendly this city is. How nobody cares. Nobody even says hello. Well, buddy, small wonder, when you keep that kind of attitude!

Funny thing about that fellow, I thought, he didn't have anything on his hands, and it was cold! Doesn't he know he should take care of himself? O well, go figure. Always be positive, I said to myself. I put my gloves on and got off the bus. Still looking for God.

Got home, exhausted. Frustrated. Then the phone rang. Wouldn't you know it? It wasn't God. Not even close! It was my cousin, Gerry. He'd fallen at work. He was in the hospital with a broken ankle. Could I drop by his house and get him a clean pair of underwear and his toothbrush? Well, I thought, Gerry old boy, you've probably been into the sauce again and you are exactly where you deserve to be. I told him I had to go to a Bible study at church and maybe I could come by later. Tomorrow at the earliest. I tell you, you give that guy an inch. Who does he think he is, God?

I turned on the TV before going to the Bible study. What a mistake! News. News. News. All bad. One of the items was about some political prisoners in some third world country being held in horrendous conditions. Then some piece about some do-gooders trying to get people to write to the government of that country to get these folks released. Seems they are likely to get tortured or 'disappeared', whatever that means. Flipped the channel to reruns of Charlie's Angels. Now that's entertainment! And all that hair!

Anyhoo, I'm on my way back to that old Bible study again. Let's just hope they have something I can really get my teeth into - you know, something where God is really real. Where God tells you what to do, and when to do it. I'll tell you, looking for God out there is not that easy. Honestly, you can't tell a sheep from a goat! Can you tell the difference?

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(We have not distributed this to churches, so if you need them to provide a reader you will need to forward it)

Group material for “Holy Habits-Service 1”

These notes are taken from “Holy Habits” c13 p185-186

A Biblical passage to Reflect On – Matthew c25 v31-46 (*although this passage may well have been one of the readings on Sunday it is always good to go back and re-read and re-reflect!*)

What do you notice in this passage?

What will you (*as an individual and a group*) do or change in the light of what you have read and noticed?

Personal suggestions

Bless your local bank or other people and groups that may be under pressure or underappreciated with some cakes. Let the staff know someone loves them.

Master or servant? As a disciple of Jesus how do you operate? Take time to ponder this especially if you have a leadership role at work, in the community or in your church. How do you kneel at the feet of those you lead?

Local suggestions

How connected/incarnate is your church within the wider community of which you are part (*both geographically and socially*)? Is there a neglected or needy part of your community you might be called to serve?

If your local Christian community is already active in serving the wider community take a little time to reflect on ‘the Christ part’ of this. How is the service you offer distinctively Christian? How is the presence of Christ revealed in what you do?

Global suggestions

To help serve the poorest renew your commitment to or get involved with an organisation that works to tackle the causes as well as the effects of poverty. There are any number of good organisations that do this but if you are stuck good places to start are:

- Internationally with Christian Aid and its partners (www.christianaid.org.uk) or tearfund (www.tearfund.org)
- In the UK the Joint Issues Team of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches campaigns on issues surrounding poverty and injustice (jointpublicissues.org.uk)

Before next week it might be a good idea to collect ideas and material on what you might do personally, locally and globally for discussion, planning and action at next week’s group.

April 29th

Church Material and Ideas for “Holy Habits – Service 2 – putting it into practice”

“the Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood. John 1 v14 “The Message”

Introduction

In the first session on “Service” we learned how as God’s Community we are to be Intentional in Mission – being sent out by God to be his people in his world. For us his world starts in our own community (Acts 1 v8) whether that is geographic or the community of family, work or Facebook. In this session we want to get a taste of what service in our community could feel like. Of course, service implies ongoing commitment - but perhaps something that you do on the day might lead to a longer-term call to serve.

As the idea is that this should replace an “ordinary” service you will not have much time and will need to think beforehand of what people might do. So perhaps meeting together for a song and a prayer and then going out for an hour or so for “outdoor” service while those who would find the outdoor service difficult for whatever reason do “indoor “service”. The principle is the same: we are doing something together to show practical love and care.

What follows are only suggestions: you know your own community and at least some of the needs and opportunities. Some of the ideas may need a bit of a risk assessment and prior arrangement but as long as our approach is ‘doing for” and not “doing to” we won’t go far wrong.

Ideas for “Outdoor Service”

- Litter picking in a local park (check with the council-let them know this is a church thing)
- Put on a coffee morning in a residential home
- Simply take cakes round to people who can’t get out (let them know in advance you are coming)
- Ask your local council if there is a job you can do together to improve the environment (this might work best in a village where you probably know some of the Parish Council)
- A garden tidy for a neighbour who can’t do it for themselves

Ideas for “Indoor Service”

- See if the food bank/community larder would be happy to distribute a little plant pot with growing seeds in it as a little extra. Then plant them up in church and get them to the distribution point once they have germinated
- “Phone a friend” or acquaintance you know is a bit isolated for a chat
- Knit a blanket square or three.

- A “we’ll come and fetch you” non-fund-raising coffee morning (or even lunch) for those who do not usually come to church. You could do this as a fellowship group activity in a group member’s home, or if you are not in such a group with 2 or 3 friends.

“Christ-like hospitality is radical action because the ‘powerful’ host has all the obligations and the ‘vulnerable’ guest-the stranger has almost all the rights. True hospitality:

- Is never sold
- Involves a friendly caring spirit
- Is an obligation to be receptive to the guest’s needs
- Is an obligation to hear the guest’s story

“True hospitality is reciprocal: the host’s role is to learn from the guest – rather than attempt to change the guest”

Ann Morisy, quoted by Andrew Roberts, “Holy Habits” p181

Summing up

You may want to make time for a “debrief” at the end (alternatively this could be done in mid-week groups) – as Jesus did with the disciples when they returned from going out (Mark 6 v30-32, though that debrief was interrupted by all the people who had been impacted by the service of Jesus and the disciples...) And you may want to spend time in fellowship/cell groups praying about the service you are already involved in as individuals, groups and church and asking God if he is calling you to something more and if so, what.

“it is very easy to become disconnected from the neighbourhoods that we are situated in and the communities we are called to serve.... (Jesus) got involved, walked the streets, sat in the market place, spent time in people’s homes. He got his hands dirty and offered the life-changing touch of holiness. He brought heaven down to earth.”

Andrew Roberts, “Holy Habits” p 179

May 6th - “own choice”

Group material for “Holy Habits -Service 2 – putting it into practice”

Read Luke c10 v1-16. Although it is unlikely our service for others in the name of Christ will involve trampling on snakes and scorpions (v19) there are some principles for service here that might help us work out our own service in a very different context to first century Galilee.

- Why did Jesus send out the 72?
- Is there any significance in his sending out this big group rather than the 12 “full time” followers?
- What were the task of the 72? (see especially v9-10)? Does this differ from our service?
- Should we make clear we serve in the name of Jesus? What problems might that create
- Is there a potential conflict “serving” to show love and change communities and “speaking” to show love and change people? What do we do with the accusation “You’re only doing this to make converts?”
- What do vs 3-4 say about resources for service that might help us?
- What do you make of v16 in the light of the possibility of people not accepting what we seek to do (assuming we are serving in the Spirit of love)

Read Luke c10 v17-23

- Have a debrief on whatever you did as a church in service to others recently.
- How do Jesus’ words encourage and challenge us as we look at what we have done and what we are planning to do?
- What “privileges” do we have as we serve Jesus and see his power work through us?

If you have brought material and ideas for possible personal, local and global action share them.

Pray about them.

Discuss what you might do as a group to encourage individual service. Is there something it would be good to do together as a group to serve? Are there any ideas to share with your church leadership team?

Plan what you are going to do. Write it down!

Do it!

Make time at future group meetings to share with each other how the plans are going and challenge and encourage each other.

Pray!

May 13th

Preaching Notes for “Holy Habits – Gladness, Generosity and Giving” (c 15 and 12)

Aim: To help us understand how God’s gifts to us result in gladness that inevitable spills into generous giving.

Content: God’s gifts to the world.

What do we offer in return?

Why is giving both easy and challenging?

Bible passages : Deuteronomy c15 v7-11

Acts c2 v44-47

2 Corinthians c9 v1-15

You might also want to consider John 3:16, Acts 2:32-33, Acts 2:38-39 , 1 Corinthians c16 v1-3 and 2 Corinthians c8 v1-15

“The Grace” which we sometimes use to close our services reveals three of the gifts with which God’s threefold character blesses us all. This sense of God giving of himself in three forms is also displayed when we read Acts 2:32-33. The ultimate example of this giving by God is detailed in John 3:16. The gift of Jesus was then supported and underscored by the gift of the spirit to all believers at Pentecost. See Acts 2:38-39

Our Creator God continues to give and provides everyone with a physical and spiritual environment intended to enable life to flourish. Even when these gifts are rejected or ignored, God’s generous (one might say extravagant) giving is undiminished.

Any giving that we make takes place within the context of this persistent, generous and bountiful provision to us by the creator and originator of all gifts.

The sharing of money and possessions, according to need that is described in Acts 2, echoes the communal funds of the disciples mentioned in John 13:29. It also parallels the requirements of the Jewish Essene Community at the time, which required the surrender of personal wealth on entering the community. This tradition continues today within some monastic orders.

However the practise as described in Acts 2 seems to be more in line with the kind of giving that we are familiar with ourselves. Everything was not all given up at once, but items were sold and the money distributed as and when required (e.g. Acts c4 v32 – 37) It seems likely that the early disciples continued working and supported themselves as well as others just as we do today.

Some denominations promote the arrangement of the tithe, where congregations are expected to give 10% of their earnings to the church. Even a fixed percentage could be a lot or a little to an individual

depending on their circumstances. A better guide might be that if you are comfortable with what you are giving then you are probably not giving enough. In other words, if you give just a little more than you are comfortable with then you are likely to have the level about right. It is good you give according to a plan as part of your budgeting (1 Corinthians c16 v2) but you may well find that you will become more (too?) comfortable as you get into it so might feel you should give extra as others' needs arise.

This personal judgement as to the appropriate level of giving (rather than a simple fixed percentage) seems to be closer in accord with the teaching of Jesus in the parable of The Widow's Offering (Luke 21). This is not the picking out of an isolated incident, instead Jesus seems to be highlighting the common fact that it is often the poorest who show most generosity.

Generosity such as that shown by Zacharias (Luke 19) seems a reasonable response in the face of the overwhelming generosity of God. However it is not simply about quantity; quality and immediacy are important too, See Proverbs 3:9. And of course God loves cheerful givers! (2 Corinthians c9 v7)

The writer of "Holy Habits" quotes the way one of his schoolteachers explained the difference between an offering and a collection "an offering", he said, "is what you give your guests when they come round for a meal. A collection is what you gather up and give the dog afterwards". The Methodist Church only exists because of generous offerings made over many generations. The circuit and the connexional system enable resources to be pooled and distributed according to need.

Giving is not limited to financial transactions. The gift of our time can be especially valuable, and it also often enables us to show that very important gift of love to those around us. We can pray, encourage, teach, grow and arrange flowers, lobby for justice, mentor, create, clean, send a kind email.... The list is never-ending!

Although it can (in some ways) be so easy, giving can also be the most challenging of the Holy Habits. It challenges us to face up directly to the self-centredness that seems to be at the very core of modern, western society. More disturbingly still our decisions about giving require us to examine ourselves for signs of selfishness and sinfulness. However when practised enthusiastically and with an openness of heart, giving goes hand-in-hand with generosity and fellowship as noted in Acts 2:46.

Practical

There is no "part 2" for this Holy Habit. However by the time you come to preach on this topic the circuit may have set up an account for those churches to do something special for the last one in the series-the "practical" on Making more Disciples - and who need resources to fund say an outreach community BBQ. This would give an opportunity for churches to make an extra offering, over and above the usual (see above) to pass on to others, very much in the spirit of the Macedonian church in 2 Corinthians c8. If this is agreed then it would be appropriate to liaise with the church you are preaching at to find out if you can turn this extra giving into a practical demonstration of love, gladness and generosity!

Giving in the Bible: John Grayston in the Scripture Union “Alive with God” on-line notes of 6/1/18)

Giving in the Bible takes many forms:

- The Old Testament sacrifices operated at many levels but always involved gifts from the people, expressions of love and gratitude. Some were especially designated as free will offerings (Leviticus 7:16).
- All firstborn belonged to the Lord and had to be offered in sacrifice or, if human or an unclean animal, redeemed with an animal sacrifice (Numbers 18:14–19).
- The first pickings of all crops were to be given to the Lord (Deuteronomy 26:1–11).
- A tithe or a tenth was given to the Lord. Details are complex but the principle is clear (Leviticus 27:30–33; Deuteronomy 14:23–27).
- The Israelites gave generously for the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:4–9; 36:2–7).
- Jesus encouraged charitable giving (Matthew 6:2), emphasising generosity and right motivation (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 12:32–34).
- Paul collected for the poor in Jerusalem and encouraged the support of local leadership (1 Timothy 5:17,18).

This is a rich and varied picture. It should warn us against any rigid insistence on a fixed proportion of income. Tithing was undoubtedly an Old Testament principle – although if the above principles were observed, rather more than a tenth would have been given. But there is no suggestion that this principle necessarily carries over rigidly into the Church as a requirement.

Giving is the hardest thing but:

- builds our relationship with God by showing gratitude and devotion
- relieves need within the community
- supports the work of God's people and those who undertake it
- is at one and the same time planned (1 Corinthians 16:1–4), and spontaneous and generous, indeed, sacrificial (Matthew 6:3,4; Mark 12:41–44)

Group material for “Holy Habits- Gladness, Generosity and Giving”

Introduction

- 1) You will have seen the images of forest fires sweeping across California. If your house was in the path of the fire, what things (as well as your family of course!) would you want to grab to take with you before you made your escape?
- 2) Now run over those items in your mind and consider what those things are made of..... When we really think it through, it becomes clear that everything we value is part of the bountiful provision that God makes for the world.

Giving back some of those gifts we have received from God has been a part of the Christian tradition right from the very beginning. In the reading we are looking at today, Paul is planning a third return visit to the Corinthians and is taking some representatives from the church in Macedonia with him. The people he is writing to have, apparently, been generous in the past but reading between the lines we can see that Paul is not totally confident that their liberal giving will be repeated!

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

- 1) In verses 1-5, how does Paul subtly encourage the people in Corinth to donate to the growing churches in surrounding areas? (see also 1 Corinthians c16 v1-4)
- 2) Paul is not only interested in what people give but why they are giving it. How does he make this clear?
- 3) How do we decide how much to give? Does Paul give any advice on this?
- 4) What does Paul suggest are the benefits to being generous? Do you agree with him?
- 5) There may be an implication in what Paul says that those who give will receive in proportion to their giving. How do you react to this in the light of people’s differing levels of wealth? You might want to look at Luke 21:1-4
- 6) What outcome from the giving for others and for us does Paul foresee?

In the end Paul brings the subject of generous giving back to its rightful foundation. It is the abundant giving

of God that makes it possible – the act of giving is a gift in itself. Not only does the means to give come to

us by the grace of God, but the generosity we show is inspired by Jesus and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” Amen to that!

Afterthought

It is worth noting that Paul gives advice to ensure probity amongst those handling money. (1Corinthians c16 v3). Although we are to give generously we are not meant to give recklessly: we are to be good stewards of the resources God gave us in the first place. This may be especially important when giving to

organisations. What reports do they give of their projects? Do you look at their annual reports to see how much of what is given goes into administration and fundraising (some has to of course) compared to other similar organisations. So- yes, give wisely – but do not let wisdom be separated from willing!

May 20th - Pentecost - “own choice”

May 27th Trinity Sunday – “own choice

June 3rd	Worship 1 (either)	16	
June 10th	Worship 2 - practical	16	Church devised session, using worship leaders etc Try different forms of worship (as well as Songs of Praise format) – drama, dance, art...
June 17th	Making more disciples (either)	17	
June 24th	Making more disciples - practical	17	Each church to have a specific outreach project –free community BBQ etc. ?Financed by joint giving from all churches into a central pool raised at the Gift Day.
July 1st	“Dare to dream” –circuit service	18	Whole circuit in one place – “bookends” the circuit launch. ?Love feast

Provisional Holy Habits plan for Q4