

DURBANVILLE METHODIST CHURCH
LENT 2017, WEEK 5
INTRODUCTION¹

Things to remember as we begin our devotional journey through Lent this year:

- God is always at work in our lives and in our world to achieve His purposes
- Prayer is not so much about our action of “talking to God” but rather about relationship with God.
- This material is to be used in “listening mode” drawing us into a sense of God’s presence with us wherever we are in our journey at any given moment, and a sense of what He is doing, rather than primarily as a “study” to try and learn more about God, or ourselves
- Therefore the focus is on becoming more aware of what God is saying to us/calling us to, right now, as we are reading this, through the material/themes that are the foundation of our journey. This year it is from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians.
- So try and set aside some time each day beside the time you would do your normal devotion, just to be still and to listen in the stillness and let the material guide you in your listening. You might find it helpful to take some time to write either in a journal, or even on this worksheet, what you are feeling/hearing/sensing God is saying.
- Remember Lent is not so much about “doing something or giving up something to try and gain God’s forgiveness or favour” (we don’t have to do this because these are His free gifts). Rather it is a time for coming intentionally, in true humility and in repentance for those things in our lives that keep us from Him and His purposes for us, to a deeper awareness of His work, by His Spirit, in our lives and in our world, in preparation for the re-commitment of our lives to His mission when we come to the events of Easter this year. It’s about being more present to His presence.

So as you prepare to use this material each week, in whatever way you choose to use it, always begin by spending time firstly, just to become still, or enter the space of stillness. Many of you will remember the Centering Exercises that were provided to groups in our Church a few years back in order to help us “shed the noise of our lives” so that we could come to the place of being still. (Psalm 46:10) These could be helpful and I am sure that Church Office could make some copies of this available to you again.

¹ Prepared by Rev. David Newton

Week 5
Our relationships
(Prayer as listening to others)

Reading: Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Reflection:

Someone once said, *“Love at work in relationships is experienced as humility.”*

Our challenge this week is letting the transforming power of this love shape our relationships. There has been so much history to how we have traditionally viewed our relationships including within the Church, and esp. using this passage to suggest that there is an hierarchical power structure to family, marriage and all other relationships that has been destructive and unhelpful. This week perhaps we just need to reset our default mode when it comes to relationships within the Church by reminding ourselves that in the opening verse of our passage Paul stresses once again that among the followers of Jesus we are all equal and therefore all relationships are of an equalitarian nature, and that when love enters in, the rule of Christ’s love, i.e. putting others before ourselves, and being prepared to serve others in humility become the basic elements. All other aspects of relationships therefore are purely functional and never to be seen as hierarchical or positions of power and authority according to our world’s understanding.

So this week’s Prayer exercise may not seem like a prayer exercise, but I want to suggest that it is. Joyce Huggett entitled her two books on listening prayer, “Listening to God,” and then “Listening to Others.” In the first she outlines all the forms of contemplative or listening prayer, and in the second how this is taken the next step by listening to what God is saying to us through others. So even though it may be a new way of praying to you, it’s not really new. Perhaps we all need to broaden our understanding of what prayer is. So here goes.

Prayer Exercise for this Week.

1. Invite the closest significant other in your life on a “date” allowing them to choose what to do during this time, and while you are doing it, ask them, “What do you think I can do to make Christ’s love more real for you?” Listen carefully as they answer.

This can obviously become a reciprocal exercise during the date as each one has a turn, or you can plan another “date” the following day when the other has a turn to answer the question.

These dates do not have to be very long. About the length of an average prayer time! (Of course you can “pray” longer if you like and spend the whole evening!)

2. Now repeat the exercise with each of your children (or grandchildren) or the others in your closest circle. Remember it has to be their choice of place and activity and

you as parent/grandparent or whatever the relationship, need to ask the question and listen for their answer

It is important that once you have asked the question, you go into “listening mode” and don’t interrupt them or try and justify yourself, esp. with explanations why you have not or cannot do it. Just listen!

3. As shortly after the “date” as you can write down what they have shared and offer yourself to God for Him to provide the opportunity for you to respond to them in love in the way they have requested.
4. And so with **all** your relationships, give some time and be sensitive to the other and look out for a time when you can ask the same question of them. And then listen! Ask God for an opportunity to respond to them as they have requested. Remember to include especially those who we might not normally take time to listen to i.e. those who help us in our homes, or gardens, or businesses. Those who serve us in the shops or at the Service Station etc.

Remember, God is at work. He is in control!!