

With all your mind?

Proverbs 1:1-7; Psalm 1; Romans 12:1-8; John 5:31-40

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Have you made up your mind what to do this Lent? Have you put your mind to it at all? Do you mind if I encourage you to do so?

For Lent, the 40 days before Easter is set aside in the Christian calendar as a period for reflection and penitence in the light of the coming remembrance of the crucifixion and celebration of the resurrection. This is to be more than a time of noting that the colours of various things have changed around the building and that the services are a bit different. It is to be a time of deepening our discipleship, of carrying our cross, following the path of our crucified Saviour.

To help us in our thinking and, I pray, encouraging us to take active steps of discipleship we are going to be looking at a number of Christian disciplines which form part of what is known as the Coventry Way. Whilst these disciplines flow out of a Benedictine tradition and the reconciliation ministry of Coventry Cathedral they should be marks all Christian people. However you think of discipline, these are not harsh or onerous additions to the Christian life, they are part of the normal expression of Christian belief and behaviour. This series is simply a way of bringing them to mind, to explore what they mean for us as individual believers and as a Christian community.

The Coventry Way is made up of seven personal commitments, a commitment to:

- i) Scripture
- ii) Supplication
- iii) Silence
- iv) Study
- v) Service
- vi) Sharing
- vii) Stewardship.

Now I have tried to think of a good title for this sermon series.

I thought of "Celebration of Discipline" but it has been done before. Then I pondered "7 Habits of Highly Effective Christians" but Will told me it was naff. To capture all the "s"s I moved on to "Seven super secrets for successful spiritual striding" but it wasn't very sexy. And all of these ideas seemed to suggest that these ideas were take it or leave it ideas, rather than a fundamental part of the Christian life.

So I have decided to call the series "It's Lent ... so we are giving it back." I hope that this frankly rather silly title will ironically help us hear the serious call to discipleship. For when something is lent to you there is a commitment on your part to give it back. In this Lent period we remember what God has done for us and it is appropriate to give something back and I hope we will make a deliberate choice to do so, we make a commitment.

Its Lent .. so we are giving it back.



It was Lent, and so
they took it back

WITH ALL YOUR MIND?

I thought preaching on these 7 disciplines was a great idea for Lent but then there was a problem as there only 5 Sundays available, so we will consider a couple of related disciplines together. So next week Will will be looking at Supplication (or prayer) and Silence, this week we are thinking about Scripture and Study.

As I thought about these two ideas, Scripture and Study, the first great commandment kept coming to my mind, particularly the idea of loving the Lord our God with our mind. Do we really try to do that? We tend to think about loving God, yes, having a spiritual feeling, yes, or even experience but do we try hard to love God with our mind? Do we do the hard work of thinking Christianly?

Certainly many people outside the Church think of believers as people who do not use their mind. In the eyes of many to claim to have any kind of Christian belief is committing intellectual suicide. Sadly often Christians have lived up or down to this image being either so closed minded that nothing can get in or so open minded that their brains seem to have leaked out.

But what about us here today do you love the Lord with all your mind, or does your mind have a day of rest on Sunday? Often Christians may be extremely well educated in their secular life, but their faith is at the same level it was when it was formed at Sunday School. Could that be true of you?

Why is this? Could it be that if we are scared that in thinking we may somehow diminish the mystery of God, or worse increase our own doubts. But is a God who is not worth thinking about truly worthy of worship?

Proverbs

The common Christian unthinking malaise is a great pity because throughout the Scriptures we see that the life of faith is in part an intellectual exercise. This is perhaps clearest in the Wisdom Literature. The aim of the book of Proverbs could not be clearer, it is about gaining wisdom, knowledge, discernment, instruction. These are learnt mental skills and they are part of the life of faith. The fear of the Lord, recognising our dependence on him as our creator, is the beginning of wisdom, not the end of thinking. Rather we are to think deeply and wisely but always informed by our faith.

Parables

We also see the importance of thinking and the mind in the parables of Jesus. These seemingly simple stories turn out to be invitations to use our minds to explore the ways of God in this world in surprising and new ways. If we do not use our minds we miss the point and so miss the depth of meaning that Jesus came to bring.

Paul

Paul after he had finished his awesome presentation of God's grace purposes in the world in the letter to the Roman church says that in view of this mercy our minds are to be transformed and no longer be conformed to this world. Our thinking is not to be stopped but transformed. The depth of Paul's thinking in the rest of the book is a clear demonstration of this. Our minds are to be continually transformed so that we can understand better how to live as God's people in God's world.

In education circles there are many catch phrases, acronyms and buzz words, like pedagogy, STEM, SOSE which seem designed to keep parents bewildered, but of particular importance for us all is the idea of being life long learners. If we are to be loving the Lord our God with all our mind, we need to be life long learners. Is that true of your Christian walk? Perhaps this Lent is a time to call such things to mind.

WHAT TO STUDY

What are we to put our mind to?

Scriptures

Firstly we are to love the Lord with our mind in relation to Scripture

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16

We looked at the place of Scripture in our Christian life for a month last year so although we are not dealing with it in detail today it rightly has pride of place in this list of disciplines. I encourage you to listen or read those sermons again. But more importantly read or listen the Scriptures. There are many tools, apps, one year Bibles, lectionary aids, Scripture Union and Bible Society notes which will help you be regular in Bible reading. Work out whether morning or evening is a better time, whether you deal better with large chunks or small.

You can join or form a Bible study group, if you would like to join a group please sign up at the back of the Cathedral.

The aim of this is not to be Bible experts, for as Jesus points out it is not knowledge of the Scriptures which saves us, rather we study the Scriptures to be pointed to Christ in whom is our life, and in that life have our mind transformed.

The Christian Faith

The next thing we should study is the Christian faith. How much do you know or think about Christian Doctrine, Church History, Apologetics, the art of defending the Christian faith. Such topics may sound daunting but so much thought has gone before us that can be helpful to us. There are many great books which will get us thinking.

I remember a few foundational books for me in my own Christian thinking. Pride of place would probably be *Mere Christianity* by CS Lewis. A wonderful rational defence of basic Christian ideas. Similarly important was Paul Little's *Know What You Believe* and *Know Why You Believe*. Are there books that have helped you?

We have a library of books in the office that are available to borrow, each of the staff will have books they can recommend to get us thinking. Currently I am reading a wonderful book by Eugene Peterson called *Practising Resurrection* based on Ephesians. I hope to run a Books at Breakfast on it when the reprint comes in.

Our World

We are to study our world. We should be interacting with the issues of our world. That might mean reading a serious newspaper once a week (which may not be easy in Tasmania) or going to public lectures on important topic which are often presented by UTAS, reading times of research like the recent Griffith Report on the state of Tasmania. Having read we then need to reflect on these topics as a Christian. What is a Christian response? We need to come to informed positions.

This is not the same as having an opinion, we all have opinions, but the issue is are they thought through and are they sustainable. I read a very interesting article through facebook in the past couple of weeks which argued that we are not all entitled to our opinions rather we are entitled only to what we can argue for, that which we can defend. (The article can be accessed through the Cathedral facebook page.)

The Cathedral provides a good forum for this with our Friday Forums. Last weeks forum with Michael Wood recently retired from Forestry Tasmania was an excellent example of a Christian thinking through an important issue of our day. Not every one will agree with him but we can all follow his example of thinking. I encourage you to listen to both his talk and his thoughtful answers to questions.

Ourselves

We should study the Bible, we should study the Christian Faith, we should study our world, and lastly we should study ourselves. This may sound dangerous, I do not suggest this because we are endlessly fascinating, despite what some of us may think, but because we always need to be looking for areas where we need to have our mind transformed. Where is our thinking and thus our actions unhelpful? Have we thought about where we play our part in the body of Christ?

The Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates well said "An unexamined life is not worth living." How often do you examine your life? Where can you serve? Where do you need to grow? Where do you need to be more Christlike in your thinking? If you're stuck ask a family member or friend. Those close to us are often better students our weaknesses than we are and I'm sure they would like to help by pointing them out. Having become aware of an issue look for Scriptures that will help and encourage clear and godly thinking. This might be in the area of forgiveness, mercy, compassion, patience. Each of us will have different issues that will come to light as we study ourselves.

Conclusion

Have you made up your mind what to do this Lent? Have you put your mind to it at all? Do you mind if I encourage you to do so?

Will you love the Lord your God with all your mind?