

Relationships with Others

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Good morning everyone.

This morning as we continue with our sermon series of a “Toolkit for Christian Living”,

I’m going to talk about how our parish Small Groups are another very practical way for us to grow in our faith as disciples of Christ.

How should we strive for in our relationships with others is “grace”.

As we grow in dependence on God, choosing a path of humble simplicity and generosity, we remove the clutter that can accumulate in our relationships

with God and others. We are thus free to live more fully and to invest more deeply in the things that truly stir our hearts. Paradoxically, our most

enduring happiness does not come from what we gain, but rather from what we give away, offering who we are and what we have to bless others.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 12:1-9

This is the first great commission: go, and walk in blessing – receiving it, releasing it

If you want to lead a life of true greatness, you can achieve that right now, where you are, without going anywhere, as you live out the days

that have been given to you for the praise of God alone. As a redeemed Whole Adam living solely for the applause of God – through the grace of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit – you will be set free and filled with light, joy, and contentment as you bless those around you with the gift of yourself by becoming the beautiful, beloved person God created you to be.

It's much tougher to make this personal. It's hard to focus on our tight-fisted grip of things that should be let go. Things like pride

. I'm referring to the pride that causes a man or woman to strut around as if a cut above other people, as if others do not matter, as

if others are in place only to strengthen their own. This "me first" pride is exposed on the playing field, in the classroom, on the street, at the party

, in the office, the boardroom, and the bedroom.

The intellectual boasts of his mental superiority, snubbing the dumb peons who cannot comprehend his insight. The religious, often blinded by their own self-righteousness, distance themselves from those caught in the more obvious vices. The one with money or talent believes he actually deserves all the fame, recognition and privilege that has been entrusted to him.

How refreshing it is to find individuals who are willing to go against the powerful current of ignorance and pride. I believe this is one of the primary reasons why people from all over the world, from all cultural and religious backgrounds, deeply appreciate the person of Jesus Christ. He had every right to hang on. It was all His in the first place. Instead He let go. He gave up his glory.

He refused any position of power. He held loosely all possessions. He resisted fame. He gave up His life.

The only sure way to break the power of past pain is to use the mighty weapon of "forgiveness." Many assume that forgiveness is a wimpy,

passive surrender only for weaklings. The opposite is true. It is the strong, the secure, and the stable who are most able to forgive (not necessarily more willing but more able). If I suffered a loss and the money you owe me is crucial to my survival,

I will be less likely to forgive the debt than if I don't need the cash. The one who forgives, who releases the debt, who lets go of the offense is the one who has a greater reserve, superior power and stronger character, manifesting moral fiber.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus taught us to pray a phrase that, if meant and practiced, would bring about a relational revolution.

It would reconcile us both with God and with each other. It would fill our mental, emotional, relational and spiritual accounts with abundance. We are to address the one who has been more offended than anyone in history, the one whom we continually hurt and fail, the one who has every right to reject and imprison us for outstanding debts. We are to say to this one, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Whenever we dare to pray those words with sincerity, God shouts, "YES! I forgive you. I let you go. I release you from all that you owe me. It's over. I have absorbed the loss. I welcome you back."

Having experienced forgiveness, it is now ours to extend. With debts erased, we can start fresh and rebuild what has been broken for far too long

Most of us would be happy with 99% of anything. If you got 99% on an exam most of us would celebrate our good mark.

If you went to the store and got 99% off the purchase price, woohoo, what a bargain! If you could achieve 99% of your life goals, most of us would think that we'd lived a pretty full life and rewarding life. But even 99% falls well short of what our heavenly Father wants for us.

Jesus gave His disciples the great commission, to go and make disciples of all nations, If you read any of the historical accounts of the Apostles after Jesus's death and resurrection, they did just that. They travelled to the distant corners of the known world spreading the Gospel, and they did make disciples wherever they went. And those disciples kept on telling other people about the good news of Jesus Christ. They told their families, their friends, their neighbours. They told the travellers in their midst, they told strangers, the told anyone who would listen about the good news of Jesus. And each generation told the next, and with God's breath they not only told the story, they wrote it down so it can never be forgotten. In these words there is hope, there is life, there is salvation.

Imagine, if you will, that this morning when you sat down in your pew, and as part of our announcements, I said that I had just received a message from a wealthy philanthropist. You were all invited to a banquet after the service. You would all be picked up by limousines, and

when you got there, you would all receive a wonderful gift. Then I counted you all up and there were 99 all totalled up. Then

Because of grace from the Father, Jesus was not content to let even one lost sheep be left behind. Because of grace extended to us through Jesus, let us not allow anyone to be left behind.

Let's pray.

Father God, We thank you for the example of the early church which was inspired by the actions of our Lord Jesus himself. We thank you for Your Word revealed through Holy Scripture. We pray that You would bless the fellowship and work of our Small Groups, that by the moving of your Holy Spirit in and among them, we may continue to be instruments of kingdom building in Your mighty hands. May we continually be inspired to seek Your will in faith and humility. This we pray in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen