

Lent 5 25th March 2020

Topic: An invitation to understanding prayer as deepening our friendship and discerning what our friend wants us to do

This week we encourage that our reflections be as inclusive of children and youth as possible. Our Youth Pastor, Chiara has put together a beautiful family time reflection for families with children to use as part of their Lenten reflections this evening. Hope you have blessed a blessed time of reflection and connection with God.

We continue this week with our Friendship with God Series, as we draw near towards our Easter weekend. I must admit, it has been a rather difficult time for many believers, myself included, to remain focused on the Lenten journey during the outbreak of the Coronavirus. It remains my hope and prayer that these reflections and our observance of the lent season will become a time where we can escape the noise and listen much more deeply to God. Which lands us well into our topic this week calling us to a deeper understanding of prayer and discernment when seeking an intimate relationship with God. In these reflections I wish to combine what are two disciplines of faith which I believe are not mutually exclusive: prayer and discernment.

One of the insights I pick up from Rev Trevor Hudson in his book, *Friendship with God: How God's offer of intimate relationship can change your life* points out is that behind a of longing for a deepened spirituality is a desire to experience in what he calls, "a conscious, personal and intimate way." If that is at the core of wanting a deepened friendship with Jesus, then our schedule needs to reflect this desire. Prayer requires that we shift ourselves from the usual spaces and routine and intentionally creating a suitable place and time for ourselves with God to create a good and healthy relationship with God through prayer. Rev Hudson highlights a couple of ingredients that are essential when seeking a healthy prayer life that will deepen our relationship with God and I wish to list them for your own reflections with some questions:

- **Intentionality**
Every relationship takes time, effort and planning. It requires that you be intentional in creating and growing this relationship through investing more time and energy. What does this mean for you in your prayer life? How much time do you create for your prayer life?
- **Conversation**
A healthy friendship requires that each friend gets an opportunity to share what is happening in their lives and the other to listen attentively. Both sharing listening is essential in a healthy relationship. How do you see this playing out in your prayer and quite time? How much time do you spend sharing? How much time do you spend listening?
- **Transparency**
Rev Hudson highlights that "good friendships invite, nurture and require growing transparency." As trust develops in each friendship, and we get to know our friends better, such friendships allow us to remove the masks we put on and sometimes hide our true selves behind. The same is required in our Divine Friendship with God. What does this transparency look like in the practise?

The second part of our reflections call of us to ask ourselves then : How many of us spend more time telling God what we would like God to do and what we are going through whilst leaving little time to listen to what God would like us to do? Furthermore, in our decision-making process, do we seek for God's guidance? Where do we normally find this guidance?

It is important to note that some decisions may be easy to make through the guidance of Scripture. But what do you do when faced with decisions which are not clearly outlined in the directives of Scripture? In this chapter, Rev Hudson explores the need for us to seek to have a meaningful and insightful relationship with God rather than simply doing that which is right. He goes on to challenge our own understanding of obedience. It is important to remember that listening for discernment is not simply seeking to hear what God wants you to do and merely doing it. Rather, it is about having the willingness to go beyond and do more than that which is required of you (see and seeking for a transformed relationship and transformed self. Faithful obedience requires us to move beyond duty to faithful servanthood.

A few questions to consider:

1. How do you typically make decisions?
2. How do you respond to the parable of the unworthy servant?
3. How do you see your prayer life playing a crucial role in helping you to discern more of God's will for your life?
4. Can you describe any one time when you believe God spoke clearly to you? How do you know it was God?
5. What do you believe God is saying to you and to us as a people during this time of the Coronavirus outbreak? Why? In your discernment check, is it in line with the nature of a friend you would want to keep? Is it in line with how God has revealed God's self in history?

May we continue to pray and discern the voice of God during this time of Lent and during these trying times of the Coronavirus outbreak. God bless@@