

“Devoted to...” Series on Discipleship

1. Devoted to:

Discipleship

Read Matthew 28: 16-20

If you are doing this as a home group discuss each of the questions

If you are doing this alone - you may want to write down your answers - or perhaps join together with a friend to discuss.

How were you disciplined when you first became a Christian (or as a child if you have always been one!!)?

How were you disciplined at other points on your journey of faith?

Who has influenced and disciplined you?

How would you describe your life as a disciple now?

What new things have you learnt about God recently - what revelations and experiences have you had?

What does the word revival mean to you?

Share any revival experiences you have personally been involved in?

What do think about the idea that revival has to be a personal thing? i.e. it starts in our own hearts before it can go anywhere else.

How do you think St Marks is like the early church in Acts?

How is it not like it?

How can it become more like it?

How does your life resemble that of a disciple in the early church?

What would you need to do to make it more so?

How willing are you to commit to those changes?

Spend some time praying - inviting the Holy Spirit to ignite revival in your heart and that of the church at St Marks Gillingham

2. Devoted to:

The Apostles Teaching
Read Acts 2 42-47

As we discussed last week- the book of Acts is the story of the church - how it grew and what it did. Acts 2:42-47 is the secret recipe of its success. If we want to be successful as a church that is devoted to Jesus and to his mandate of spreading the word and making disciples of all nations then we need to model ourselves on this early church! The first thing we discover about the early church is that they were devoted to the apostles teaching- what does this mean for us today?

So what were the apostles teaching- Read Matthew 28:16-20

The Apostles weren't making things up, they weren't giving their own teaching- but they were teaching the rest of the church what Jesus had commanded, what Jesus had taught them. They were teaching the red print in a 'Jesus words' bible. The early church didn't have the New Testament, they didn't have the gospels, and most of them would not have met or heard Jesus (although some clearly would have). They relied on the Apostles repeating what Jesus had told them.

How did they know to trust the Apostles teaching? Read Acts 2:43

The way that they knew that this was the truth is that the Apostles also worked miracles in Jesus name Read Acts 3:1-6 for one example - what other examples does the book of Acts give?

This is important, Jesus - in the power of the Holy Spirit was confirming their words by their actions - just as Jesus had done.

Today we may not have original eyewitnesses to listen to but we have the written words of Jesus and the apostles in the form of the New Testament.

How do we devote ourselves to teaching? Discuss

Do you rely on a 20 minute sermon on a Sunday morning and what the preacher says? Do you let them do the work and just accept what they say? I know that some of you- especially the older ones amongst you feel that the bible preaching is not as good as it once was - that there is not enough meat! But if you are relying on the sermon only for your Bible knowledge then you risk being deceived!

Read Acts 17:10 -11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NB - this may appear only to relate to prophecy depending on what version you are reading from but other translations and in the original Greek seem to separate out the sentences to indicate that you should test all things)

It is important that we devote time ourselves to studying scripture, so that we know what the bible says, we know what the right things to do are. The Bereans checked what the Apostles taught against their scripture - the Old Testament, to check that Jesus was the messiah and that what he taught did not contradict what God had already said. What Scriptures do you know that remind us that scripture is important if we are to follow God?

We cannot rely on others telling us - in fact we are warned against this Read 2 Timothy 4:3-4, 1 John 4:1-3, Revelation 2:2

What do you think about these warnings?

Being part of a homegroup is good as you can discuss and study with others and can work out whether there are differences in interpretation - you may even disagree with the preacher!! Homegroups are a great opportunity to delve deeper into what has been preached on a Sunday.

But additionally it is good to study on your own, to take time each day to read scripture - there are many tools out there to help you. From yearly devotional books, to daily bible study notes - both in book form and online to bible in one year packages as well. Discuss with your group how you study the bible and if you don't already- check out what others do. Perhaps you could start a bible reading group to all study the same thing or to read through the bible in one year!!

If we have studied our scripture then we are always ready, always able to give an answer when people ask- this does not always have to be from scripture but from our own experience, but scripture helps. When Jesus was challenged by satan in the desert he responded using scripture.

Being devoted to the apostles teaching means that we are extreme, continual and intense in our approach to scripture, that we give all or most of our time or resources to it. We should be keen to read scripture; we should be excited to read scripture - it should not be a chore but something that feeds and empowers us daily. It is God's word, given to light our paths and to bring us to life in all its fullness.

A final point on being devoted to scripture is to think about how we respond to criticism of it. How we speak about our what we know?

Read Acts 4 13, 18-20

Are you ever likely to be commanded not to speak about your faith, if so - how would you respond in this situation? Discuss

In order to reflect the early church we need to devote ourselves to teaching!

3. Devoted to:

Fellowship

Read Acts 2:42-47

The second ingredient in our recipe for a successful church is extreme, continued and intense devotion despite whatever hardship or difficulty result in one's life because of that devotion to each other! That we give all or most of our time or resources to each other!

Just let that idea settle and really think about it for a few minutes.

Being devoted to fellowship means giving all or most of you time to others in the church fellowship, being loyal, steadfast, intense in your devotion to all the other people that worship at St Mark's!

If you are studying this in a small group then you are already part of the way to being devoted to fellowship.

Discuss your thoughts on what being devoted to one another means.

If you are doing this on your own ..

When was the last time you met up with and shared with others from church outside of a Sunday service? (and not at a meeting!!)

How often to you meet and fellowship with others from the church?

Do you eat with others from church regularly- or only if we have a lunch at church?
If you answered - never or not much - why not? If you don't belong to a small group - why not?

How devoted are you to the fellowship on a Sunday morning?

Do you turn up on time or even early to welcome and chat to others?

Do you talk to people other than those you came with? Do you talk to people you have never spoken to before or don't know - or do you wait for them to speak to you?

Are you an encourager of others like Barnabas was!

Do you willingly share their burdens?

Do you treat the other church members like family? Because we are you know!

Do you serve your family by being on the welcome team/ AV team/worship team.....

Finally- don't be flaky!! If you say you'll do something- Do it!

In a church the size of St Marks it would be unrealistic to be able to know intimately all 150 or so people on our electoral role (the only real membership list we have as an Anglican Church) and all the children and young people who are part of St Mark's, so the way we encourage relationship building and fellowship outside of a Sunday morning is through our small groups - where it is possible to build community and to love each other and know each other well, where it is possible to do life together.

It is important therefore to be devoted (extreme, continued and intense devotion) to our small group i.e. turn up to meetings, be in contact, socialise with them.

If you are not part of a small group can I encourage you to attend one - or if they don't meet at a time you can manage - then talk to Pauline Jackson or to Amanda about starting one.

4. Devoted to:

The Breaking of Bread

Read Acts 2:42-47

This week we are considering the early churches devotion to the breaking of bread together. We thought last time about being devoted to fellowship and in that there is an element of sharing meals with one another-and, as we discovered in 2018 with feeding the 5,000, when we put our minds to it-we are actually quite good at eating together and feeding people. The early church took seriously Jesus instructions to remember him when they broke bread together and drank wine together. Part of this practice was whenever they ate together in fellowship meals, but they also started a practice of a communion service-possibly not as we know it today but certainly separate from a general meal. There is a depiction in the Catacombs of a communion meal from around 100AD which shows

the breaking of the bread but also fish included. The Didache - an ancient Christian writing also gives the apostles instructions on communion- majoring on prayer and thanksgiving and it is not until the 4th Century that we find the more ritualistic instructions for communion that we use today from Cyril of Jerusalem. For more details see:

earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/communion-in-the-early-church/

Do you take seriously eating together and remembering Jesus?

Do you take seriously the sharing of communion in a worship service?

What does communion mean to you?

Communion is an opportunity to remember what Jesus did for us and what he is going to do for us.

It is an opportunity to get our lives back on track with Jesus

It is an opportunity to pledge our love for God and for each other.

It is an opportunity to pledge our devotion to the Lordship of Jesus in our lives.

Read 1 Cor 11: 17-34 - What do you think is going on here?

When we do communion right it brings us life and peace, but when we approach with a wrong attitude it can be destructive as we see in this passage.

Communion is both vertical-our meeting with God and giving thanks and remembering Jesus

And horizontal- meeting and sharing with our church family. Read Matthew 5:23-24

Communion is the place today where we approach the altar and as we receive communion we offer ourselves afresh to God and so we need to take seriously this commandment to be reconciled to one another, to use the peace as a place to ask forgiveness and to be in right relationship with one another.

Is there anyone you need to be reconciled with?

5. Devoted to:

Prayer

Read Acts 2:42-47 (it's the last time I promise!!) Read Acts 1: 12-26

What were the Disciples doing now that Jesus had left them? Read Acts 3:1-10

Where were Peter and John going when they healed the lame beggar?

Read Acts 4:1-31

What did the disciples do when they were persecuted?

The answer is not 42 (For fans of the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy!!) The answer is Prayer!!!

Dip into any chapter in the book of Acts and you will find prayer underpinning everything

- When they faced hardship
- When they needed to make decisions
- When direction for the future was needed
- When healing was needed
- When unexpected needs arose

They PRAYED!

What is your prayer life like?

Be honest with each other-prayer really is the most difficult thing even though it really is the simplest of things also.

Did you take part in the 24/7 prayer week? Did you read Pete Greig's book How to Pray? did this help, have you kept up the practices?

Prayer is the heart (or the boiler room) of our relationship with Jesus, it is the way we communicate with him.

Did you know we have a boiler room at the Old Vic-you can book in to pray anytime the Old Vic is open!

Spend some time now speaking to God either as a group or individually.

PAUSE - stop and be still before God

REJOICE - Thank God for all that is good &@ What do you need to God to do in your life

ASK - Surrender to his will and purpose

YIELD - surrender to His will and purpose
