

Committing to things associated with new life in Christ

A sermon on Hosea 11:1-11, Luke:13-21, Col 3:1-11 by John Fowler 4 August 2019

The Colossians reading – which I am going to focus on tonight - goes like this - Nathan's paraphrasing:

“If you are fair dinkum when you say you have been raised to new life with Christ, then commit yourself to the things that belong to such a life. Look to Christ — God's right hand person — and take your cues from him. Concentrate on the things that matter to Christ, and don't let yourselves get hooked into the agendas that preoccupy the world around you.”

Paul here is telling us to embrace the culture of God – a culture of love, mercy and reconciliation. Easily said – but how do we do it?

In my opinion the Christian Church has historically interpreted, preached and practised this admonition through a series of “thou shalt nots” – negativity - many listed in Exodus 20:1–17 and in [Deuteronomy 5:4–21](#):

Thou shalt not steal

Thou shalt not covet

Thou shalt not work on the Sabbath day

Thou shalt not commit adultery

Thou shalt not make or worship idols

And then there are those prohibitions listed in Leviticus:

Thou shalt not eat pig flesh, crustaceans or seafood, rabbit or camel

Thou shalt not wear blended fabrics – no cotton and wool blends, no cotton and elastine, no polyester and lycra

Thou shalt not eat your steak too rare

Men are not to have long hair; women should not have short hair
(1 Corinthians 11:14) And no tattoos!

But these “Shall Nots” – originally intended to enable the church and its officials to control its adherents – does not seem to have worked – especially today! We don’t like being dictated to. We want the freedom to make our own choices. In place of the “Thou Shalt Nots” which the church seems to have cherished and promoted for centuries, we could consider developing a list of “Thou Shalls” - or using more contemporary language – a list of “We Shoulds” – or really “We Musts”!

What could such a positive list look like? What are some of the things which should go on such a list? Of course this is not an exhaustive list!

1. We should be humanitarian:

- use our skills and our talents (our gifts) and share them with others
- not being selfish or egotistical
- not doing as the farmer did in tonight’s parable in Luke – storing away goods in excess of his needs – share them!
- contributing time, energy and money to assist others. The emotions that accompany helping others helps us to grow in ways we cannot even imagine,
- being kind and loving to people

2. We should treat other people with consideration and respect – be tolerant of other points of view:

- I am sure we are all saddened by the number of cases of physical and verbal abuse which are reported these days
- the staggering number of paramedics, nurses and police assaulted as they attempt to do their job helping and supporting others in our communities
- the assaults on teachers and principals in schools by parents and students. Recent research indicates that our teachers suffer the greatest rate of work related stress.
- reported assaults amongst spectators at AFL games
- Vegans illegally trespassing onto the property of animal farmers and causing financial as well as physical and emotional damage.
- More people are beaten down by words than by fists!
- Peter Van Onselen (Professor of Politics at the University of Western Australia) wrote recently “It’s hard to overstate the ridiculousness, overzealous subjectivity and downright hypocrisy on both sides of the Israel Folou debate”.

- Some people and groups previously “oppressed” have become oppressors. I am ashamed of some of the behaviour and the intolerance of some people on my side of the fence which surrounded the Marriage Equality campaign. Some who had been oppressed became oppressors. The “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” mentality must not be re-embraced.
- An angry generation will not bring about reform and peace to the world. Love, consideration and respect for others will.
- On a recent Q&A program that old rocker Jimmy Barnes said “Treat people with respect regardless of their background, their sexuality or their religion. Let’s get rid of bullying.
- The radically different notions of tolerance, understanding and kindness of our role model – Jesus Christ – changed the world. As members of the community of Christ it is our obligation to keep doing this work of being the best people we possibly can.

3. We should take care of God’s Creation:

- I believe that human mismanagement – abuse – of our earth is something we humans have to own up to and do something about – and sooner rather than later
- Some of this abuse has been out of ignorance and complacency – but a lot of it has historically been based on greed and short-sighted expediency.
- Too often we trivialise our degradation of the earth and simplify it in terms of global warming, climate change and green-house gas emissions – but the problem goes beyond just these issues.
- Many of us – and many of our governments - are only concerned with the ‘here and now’ and ignore the concept of sustainability – the use of resources we need now to live but also looking to the future to see that there will be sufficient resources left for future generations.
- Some recent research has shown that fish are chilling out on discarded human drugs in our waterways. Crabs are too chilled out on Prozac to be scared of predators – and fish are becoming feminised from hormones.
- Researchers have found traces of anti-depressants, pain killers, cholesterol drugs, antibiotics and the oral contraceptive pill among the pharmaceutical drugs in our waterways.
- It seems the aquatic animals are getting addicted to illicit drugs in the water the same way as earthworms get addicted to caffeine when coffee grounds are regularly thrown into the compost.

- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has released a statement saying “Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.
- When the world was created God did not draw a line between Mexico and the USA!

4. We should embrace Spirituality:

- Yes – I suggest that we need to explore our Spirituality as distinct from exploring or embracing just religion.
- Spirituality enables us to follow our heart – our conscience – and encourages us to listen to our intuition and do what is right for us and for others around us.
- It allows us be free to be the best we can be and to be a good person with no promise of reward or fear of punishment. The reward is simply our own inner contentment and happiness.
- Religion is largely about following a specific ideology or a set of rules or regulations – commandments – “Thou Shalt Nots”!
- Within most religions there is a lot of fear. Fear of the consequences of our actions, fear of what might happen after we die - if we don’t live our life accordingly to the interpretations or dictates of a particular denomination or sect.
- With spirituality love encourages us to focus all of our energy only on the good, and to act only with love.
- Spirituality reminds us that we are not separate – not exclusive or elite; there are no borders, no races and no cultural divides.
- Spiritual exercise keeps our mind in shape the way physical exercise keeps our body in shape.

5. We should live in the here and now:

“The New Revised Standard Version of the Colossians reading says “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Heavenly mindedness is not to be understood as a form of complacency or irresponsibility or absentmindedness about life or social and economic conditions or a sense of – “I don’t need to do anything – God will provide!” Heavenly mindedness should not mean that we ignore our earthly environments and our earthly associates and neighbours.

Having a heavenly focus compels us as believers towards action within our social, economic and political systems to pursue justice and fairness – to make a positive difference for others – as well as for ourselves:

- It should generate desires and actions of social justice and social responsibility - rather than self-centredness
- A concern for the marginalised
- An outreach to the “outsiders” rather than a focus just on the “insiders”
- Jesus has brought us back from separation and alienation and reconciled us to God. We don’t have to save ourselves nor can we save others - we can only long to know this Christ more and live deeply into his love and great kindness and grace
- Christ is brought into the world by each of us.

In a few minutes we will be celebrating a spiritual feast – the Eucharistic. Jesus’ invitation was and is to “all”. However – in some churches – in some religions – there are rules and restrictions – a minimum age, having to be baptised, to be confirmed – or whatever! Here in this community of faith no such exclusions apply - we just have to come as we are. Jesus has become the broken bread of life. Come, eat, receive life and love into our being and let it transform us.

Through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we are reconciled to God, made free to be the person that God created us to be. We are loved and set free. We just have to live into it by doing these positive things:

1. being humanitarian
2. treating other people with consideration and respect and being tolerant of other points of view
3. taking care of God’s Creation
4. embracing Spirituality
5. living in the here and now – embracing the culture of God – a positive culture of love, mercy and consideration.

Wouldn’t it be heaven on earth if our world was like that?

Amen.