

WELCOME 26th January 2025 – 3 Epiphany '25 C

Psalm 1:1-6 & Colossians 2:6-10

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! *Happy Australia Day!* Along with your worship order you have in your hands & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link is on website...

As we move into this week...When we lived in Nth Texas, **Mike** Murdock was one of those flashy splashy TV evangelists w/ good hair & a church not far from us. But you know even a **blind** squirrel can find an acorn now & again...I found something he said that really struck **me**: "Habit is stronger than desire":|| Think about that...if you've tried to break a bad habit or start a new healthy one...we desire the good new healthy w/ all our heart, but often as not the old habits take over. I can want the good but my inclination is toward whatever is my habit. Paul said that... *Rom 7:21ff*

Well...under stress...when life gets rough...in crisis...when the winds of change are blowing hard against us, how do we find the strong/healthy/good? How do we hold firm? Where do we find strength/sustenance...security/resilience?

Scriptures are clear: Remain in God's Word...Strength...wisdom...hope...joy...truth...life

Oh, *the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.*

But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit in each season.

Ultimately God's Word leads us to Jesus & life everlasting...**AND** the assurance God is still w/ us. Christ is still at work w/in us. The Spirit still speaks to us & is powerful through us.

Now, *just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.*

Let your roots grow down into him, & let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, & you will overflow with thankfulness"

Our habits hold us...What we do as habit may not be ultimate, but it is essential.

As God plants & grows you in his word, Christ grows in you.

Let's pray...and then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you knew us before we knew ourselves. You consecrate us even now to be your servants. Create in us hearts worthy to be your prophets that we might go where you send us, and speak the Word that you give us. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, place your words upon our lips, your grace upon our hearts & your power in our lives so that everywhere we are your Kingdom is seen & claims hearts & lives in your love for all eternity... In the name of your beloved Son Jesus we pray. Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What is one thing you do consistently to "let your roots grow down into Christ"?
2. Where do you think would Paul say a believer's life in Christ is lived?
How would Paul fill in the blank...Discipleship happens (_here_)

3 Epiphany '25 C – WINDS OF CHANGE: STAND IN THE WORD

When you put your shoes on...which shoe first? **R or L**? Do you have a set go-to-bed & wake-up **time**? Do you put things off, procrastinate? Are you habitually early or late to events? Is there a **routine** to your devotions & prayer time? Habits are intriguing things...athletes are the **worst** w/ their rituals & habits getting set for a moment in play. Many of us...I'd say perhaps most of us aren't always aware of our habits. We just do stuff the way we do it. It's muscle memory; for the most part. (make bed load dishwasher arrange tools/utensils) In high school I used to spin my pen around on my hand while I was listening to the teacher...right up to the point she walked to my desk, grabbed my hand & said, **STOP IT!**

Habits are intriguing things...& **THEY MATTER**. How we order our lives...patterns for living...routines say a great deal about us. David Mathis...US pastor/writer **says**, "Show me your habits, & you'll give me a glimpse into your very soul." He must be familiar w/ Ps 1: **Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night.** There's a visible progression in David's thinking...You can start off fairly innocently going where everyone else is going...follow the crowd... Once you're part of the crowd, you hang out there...settled/comfortable...then you know since you're there you "join in" w/ what the crowd does...just once & soon enough you have a habit of pursuing what the crowd wicked/sinners/mockers pursue. What begins w/o real intent eventually becomes a pattern...habit. We become who we habitually are...**we** become our habits. Show me your habits & I may just see your soul.

It can start as simple as a loss of focus...you look away from what you have toward what might be **available**...Rather than enjoying what we already have, our eyes drift to inferior options, & the very good thing we have is put at risk. Habits matter...& while the Bible only uses the word "habit" one time, the idea is saturates OT & NT. We're familiar w/ **"Let us think of ways to provoke one another to acts of love & good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as is the HABIT of some, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of Christ's return is drawing near."** – Heb 10:24-25

Though phrased in the negative "don't get in the habit of missing Xn worship/fellowship," the positive is **CULTIVATE THE HABIT** of consistent participation in genuine Xn fellowship & community worship that grows & deepens faith anticipating Christ's return.

Remember earlier...**Habit** is stronger than desire...I don't know how many people have told me that life was admirably arranged for them to start back in worship after a long absence but habit overwhelmed the desire. Or they want to read the Bible/pray more...daily...but just can't find the time. We've all done it: Lose a few kilos...stop smoking...cut screen time...better grades...eat healthy...**BUT Habit Is Stronger Than Desire**...habit overwhelms us...

But as followers of Jesus, we have a strength dwelling w/in us that can transform & recreate us deeper than our **habits**. Paul said it: *My old self has been crucified w/ Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. So I live in this earthly body trusting in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me.* – Gal 2:20 or Jesus: *Listen carefully: I have given you authority [that you now possess] to tread on serpents & scorpions, & [the ability to exercise authority] over all the power of the enemy (Satan); & nothing will harm you.* – Lk 10:19 AMP or Isaiah: *God gives power to the weary & strength to those who have no might.* – Is 40:29

That's what David meant when he describes the blessedness/joy security/resilience strength/sustenance of all **who** *"delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night"* & points us toward living **"like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit in each season. Their leaves never wither, & they prosper in all they do."** **NB** here, what David calls *"the law,"* is not just the commandments, moral codes, *do this/don't do that* of the Sinai covenant, but the wider understanding of living by God's wisdom & God's way of dealing w/ other people & life circumstances in this world...submitting all we are to the scrutiny & accountability of God's Word. He counsels our becoming so familiar w/ God's Word...so saturated by the very texts the Holy Spirit has delivered to us...that our lives are perpetually drawing strength & provision as the Father offers it **AND** sharing what we receive beyond our own lives...as Paul says: **And now, just as you received Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow (walk in step with) him. Let your roots grow down into him, & your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, & you will overflow with thankfulness.** *bearing fruit/overflow beyond us*

OT/NT alike, the wisdom remains: the habits we develop & sustain today affect us throughout our lives. Heaven & hell in many ways dwell in our habits. *Oh, the joys of those who do not...BUT who delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night... bearing fruit in each season...leaves never wither...prosper in all they do "...not so the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment...the path of the wicked leads to destruction."* Our capacity to persevere in faith...to hold firm under stress...remain upright when life gets rough...to w/stand times of crisis...to be resilient when the winds of change blow hard against us...to resist the siren call of wicked/sinners/mockers...*to grow strong in the truth you were taught...&...overflow with thankfulness...is always found when we remain in the Word... becoming so familiar w/ God's Word...so saturated by the very texts the Holy Spirit has delivered to us...that our lives are perpetually drawing strength & provision as the Father offers it AND sharing what we receive beyond our own lives.*

As followers of Jesus, we have a strength dwelling w/in us that can transform & recreate us deeper than our habits...**AND IT IS ALREADY OURS...By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by**

coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory & excellence. – 2 Pet 1:3 Peter/Paul agree: Jesus defines our lives as his disciples. His death & rez transform us & in the same way, the world around us. Everything flows from that relationship of life eternal as it comes to us through God's Word. We begin w/ the word of restoration/forgiveness/life/salvation in Jesus crucified/risen for us. Then we grow as his followers/disciples in likeness to him by building that relationship w/ Jesus through God's Word...read, trust, obey, worship...meditate day/night Everything of value emerges in us/through us as God builds our lives on the foundation of his Word.

A very angry Paul would say to the Galatians, **Oh**, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. Let me ask you: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the word you heard of Jesus Christ. – Gal 3:1-2 Galatians got distracted & lost touch by challenges to their faith so Paul wrote to remind them...Whenever you get distracted, banged up, confused, worried, scared...go back to Jesus in God's Word. The entire Christian life becomes a perpetual process of **just** as you received Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to walk in step with him. Let your roots grow down into him, & your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, & you will overflow with thankfulness. It never gets more complicated than that, & it never is more difficult than taking hold of the Scriptures expecting God to speak.

As Living Water we encourage the habits of devoted prayer & reading the Bible, of relating to others to grow/be supported in Christ, to intentionally be part of the worship of the believing community & imitating Christ serving & embodying his generous grace in all things...just as you received Christ Jesus as your Lord...continue to walk in step w/ him. Let your roots grow down into him, & your lives be built on him...delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night...like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit in each season...whose leaves never wither...flourishing in all you do.

Our capacity to persevere in faith...to hold firm under stress...remain upright when life gets rough...to w/stand times of crisis...to be resilient when the winds of change blow hard against us...to resist the siren call of wicked/sinners/mockers...to grow strong in the truth you were taught...&...overflow with thankfulness...is always found when we remain in the Word... becoming so familiar w/ God's Word...so saturated by the very texts the Holy Spirit has delivered to us...that our lives are perpetually drawing strength & provision as the Father offers it **AND** sharing what we receive beyond our own lives

Under stress...when life gets rough...in crisis...when the winds of change are blowing hard against us, how do we find the strong/healthy/good? How do we hold firm? Where do we find strength/sustenance...security/resilience?

Scriptures are clear: Remain in God's Word...Strength...wisdom...hope...joy...truth...life

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit in each season.

Ultimately God's Word leads us to Jesus & life everlasting...**AND** the assurance God is still w/ us. Christ is still at work w/in us. The Spirit still speaks to us & is powerful through us.

Now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.

Let your roots grow down into him, & let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, & you will overflow with thankfulness"

Our habits hold us...What we do as habit may not be ultimate, but it is essential.

Remember...**As** God plants & grows you in his word, Christ grows in you.

As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

TAKE IT HOME

How might you plant yourself deeper in God's word this week?

Where will you ask God for that Word to bear fruit in someone's life beyond your own?

(Be specific...where/with whom do you want God's Word, the Spirit's presence & Christ's power to be at work through you for someone else?)

Let's pray with that in mind... Lord Jesus, help us to see you at work all around us & to experience your Spirit working within us. Open us to those moments when we can share what we've experienced of you with others & invite them into your enormous love. Make us agents & instruments of your grace & the triumph of your kingdom... In your Name we pray... Amen...