

Sermon 26 March 2023 Building a relationship with God

John 15:9-17

The following notice was spotted in the Lost and Found section of a newspaper: 'Lost dog - \$50 reward. Black and tan dog of Poodle and German Shepherd descent. Flea bitten, left hind leg missing, no hair on rump, blind and recently neutered. Answers to the name of Lucky.

We may not be in quite as bad a shape as Lucky but we can count ourselves lucky. We are lucky to be gathered here this morning. Why do I say that? Well first of all, there are such lovely, friendly people that belong to this church and it is good to have the opportunity to mix and mingle and get to know each other.

But secondly, and most importantly, it means we have the opportunity to learn about and establish a relationship with God. The benefits are massive and I don't intend to go into them in detail right now. Suffice to say, a relationship with God stands us in such good stead as we wrestle with the rigours of life and as we seek meaning in our lives.

I was thinking about this sermon early Thursday morning and I happened to come across this verse as part of my morning devotions: *'As the scriptures tell us, "Anyone who believes in him, will not be disappointed."* Romans 10:11. I thought how appropriate is that! Thank you, Lord.

So how do we arrive at this relationship? Well, coming to church is certainly a very good start. We mix with people who have a similar goal. We worship with those people. We read the Bible and we pray. All very important, but I just want to make this point – persevere.

I want you to picture a scene. The scene is a small toddler (we will call him Jimmy) about 12 months old, lurching, stumbling, falling down, picking himself up and continuing across a room. And waiting across the room is Gran, with arms outstretched, encouraging him and sweeping him up in her arms when he finally makes it.

Little Jimmy doesn't realise it but he is at the absolute peaks of his learning powers. He can't talk yet, let alone read and write. In another year he'll be able to say that he wants to go and visit Gran; in 10 years he may be able to explain why he wants to go and visit Gran; and in 20 years, if he takes the right university courses, he may be able to describe how his infant muscles carried him across the room to the waiting arms of Gran.

But at one year old, he simply did it. That's how children learn. They make mistakes, they fall down, but they persevere, and in persevering, they learn how.

As adults we are inclined to intellectualise our learning. If we were learning to walk as adults, we would take Walking 101, a basic course in self-propulsion, followed by advanced courses in Balance, in Direction, in Vertical Stability. When it comes to religion, there are invariably many rules and regulations, a way of going about learning and practising out religion. But perhaps we need to be like children and just do it; to try it and keep on trying until we get it.

Don't give up. Hang in there. No one has promised that it will be easy, but when we get there, we will know. Just as Jimmy felt the love of his Gran when he finally made it, so we will experience the love of God, because that's what it is all about. That is what we are talking about here. I quote from our Gospel reading, *'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.'*

I also quote from 1 John 4:7-8. *'My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. The unloving know nothing of God, for God is love.'* Wonderful words that carry so much truth.

I want to finish with an illustration. I have two flowers with me. One of the flowers is a cut flower. It is meant to be placed in a vase with water. The other is a potted plant.

One of these flowers will last much longer than the other. It will be stronger and will be able to hold up better under any sort of conditions. Can you tell me which one I am talking about? (*Congregation answers*)

That's right. It's the potted plant. It is better off because it has roots. The cut flower will last only a few days and then it will have to be thrown out because it has been cut off from its roots.

We are the same as these flowers. We need our roots. If we are to hold up under any sort of conditions, we need something which is going to provide us with a strong base, a foundation which gives us our strength, which serves as an anchor.

A personal relationship with God, with Christ will do just that. I am not talking about just having a belief. That's fine and important, but if we are to really receive from God that support, that inspiration, then we need to take that belief a step further and develop it into a personal relationship.

Not that easy and not that straightforward. We really do need to work at it, to persevere, because in the end, the result will be rewarding. I repeat the quote from Romans 10:11, *'As the scripture tells us, "Anyone who believes in him, will not be disappointed."* If it's in the Bible, it has to be true!

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