

**Readings** Verse for the day: 2 Cor 3:18

Jeremiah 17: 5-8

Ephesians 3:16-20

John 15:1-5

*Songs: Be Thou my Vision*

*Spirit of the Living God*

**PPT1 Timoti Te Moke**

Last week I read a powerful book that a friend of mine recommended saying every NZer should read this. ‘The Unlikely Doctor’ by Timoti Te Moke. Just published - about how a young Maori boy who suffered a traumatic, violent childhood, time in state care, had little engagement with the school system, got into crime and gangs, and had stints in prison. I won’t tell you details of the journey but he is now a new graduate Dr at 56 years old working in Middlemore. Because of his journey he is able to relate to patients and family who are part of the gang world and seeks to make changes in NZ society to improve the lot of Maori. It is a riveting story! I believe that what enabled Timoti to keep going forward was that for his first 6 years he experienced unconditional love when he lived with his grandparents. Then at least 3 times in his life he had moments, which I believe were God moments, when he ‘heard’ a voice in his heart saying: ‘There has to be more than this’. The first time he heard this was when he was in prison and looked up out the window and saw a patch of blue sky. This is indeed a story of a young abandoned, hurt child into a man transformed who wanted to find another way to live and make a difference in society.

**PPT2 Fruits**

For the last 2 months we have had the series on the fruits of the spirit.

I wonder if you look back over this last week - can you remember an occasion when you observed evidence of a fruit of the spirit being offered to you or another? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control.

Was there an occasion when you offered that to someone else?

Can you think of a time when you offered that to yourself?

Recognition and acknowledgment of our failings is the beginning of transformation into being love. Has there been some hint of transformation / growth in your character in the fruits of God’s Spirit? Maybe an actual acknowledgement that you were impatient or noticing that you were more patient with other drivers on the road ... that you were kind to a stranger....

**PPT3. Transformation - The Inward journey**

How does growth in these fruits happen in us? How are we transformed into the fullness of all we are created us to be?

Socrates says ‘the unexamined life is not worth living!’ David’s prayer to God in Psalm 139:23 ‘Search me, O God, and know me. Test me and know my anxious thoughts.’ Having the courage to look within invites us to be present to our lives and our emotions. If we don’t honour our feelings we will probably project that onto others. Spiritual practices which reveal our interior world will gradually lead to a deeper relationship with God!

**PPT 4 Examen**

1. A prayerful review - such as what we have just done is a form of the prayer of **Examen** which we could use on a regular basis as part of the **Inward Journey of prayer**.

Prayerfully reflecting on the thoughts, feelings and actions of our day/ week /month to discern the footprints of the Holy and how we have responded.

A time to review our day with God.

**PPT5. Pray - reading Scripture**

2. So when we read scripture let us read with expectant hearts that God will speak to us. I remember being shocked in my 20s when I read Proverbs 26: 18,19. Like a madman is one who deceives his neighbour and says ‘I am only joking!’ That had been a habit of mine to make ironic comments - funny from my point of view but not necessarily from the perspective of the other. Now as I read the Jer. passage again I wonder what your prayer response might be?

‘But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord - he will be like a tree planted by the water - that sends out its roots by the stream.’ Can you imagine yourself as a tree with your roots searching for water? ..... What are the practices that nourish your life and your walk with God? ....

Transformation will begin as we read scripture and bring ourselves honestly to God.

3. **Keep a journal** – an intentional reflection on the events of the day

In my 40s I became interested in the contemplative stream of christian tradition whose strength is relationship with God - being attentive to how you and God communicate.

### **PPT6. Who is God?**

However to engage in the prayer of examen or writing a journal means having courage to be vulnerable with self and we might not want to expose ourselves to God - if the particular God we believe in is not safe. Jesus came to earth so we could see who God is! So when we realise the God we believe in is not a safe God to be ourselves with - let's go to the gospels and watch Jesus.

### **PPT7 What if God is a God of relationship?**

Gen 1:26. ‘God said: Let us make man in our image, to be like us!’

Created to be in relationship with the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit’

Does God really love us - as we are?!

Eph 2: 8-10 For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the *gift* of God - not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's *masterpiece*, created in Christ Jesus to do good works ...

Strahan Coleman encourages us to: ‘move from a transactional relationship with God to a deeper friendship, discovering prayer not so much as conscious mental dialogue but as a mutual gaze between the soul and God.’

So as well as looking inward to deepen our relationship with God we also need to **look upward** 2 Cor 3:18. *And we all with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another*. So what veils might be over our eyes inhibiting us from beholding God? Do we have expectant, open hearts to see God, for as we behold God we will be changed.

Can we **Learn to behold God and to be in God's gaze?**

Some of us have felt we live or are living under the glare of God rather than the gaze.

A gaze of love is particularly evident when you watch a parent or grandparent gaze on a beloved child. Some of us will have experienced that strongly from our parents and so find it easier to receive the loving gaze of God. Others of us will have experienced a more critical parenting style which often results in us becoming a critical parent to ourselves. So how can we learn to receive and live more in the gaze of a loving God who delights in us?

### **PPT8 Icon of Jesus**

I have a couple of prayer suggestions to behold God and be in the gaze

- We can start by using a **breath prayer** telling God our desire - such as ‘God of love - let me know your gaze on me.’
- Using an **Icon of Jesus** and simply sitting before Jesus and allowing his gaze to be on you! Can you remember an occasion when someone gazed on you with love and you felt completely free, accepted and loved? Jesus loves you this I know.

*Choose one of those and let's be still for a minute either with praying the breath prayer or simply being in the gaze. ....*

### **PPT 9 In Silence and Solitude**

Strahan Coleman, a young NZer who has faced severe health challenges, talks about un-noising ourselves, taking time to be with God, and through that being transformed.

Looking at this photo - many people experience a sense of God when they are **in nature**. Romans 1:20 says 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.'

As you look at that photo what is your response to God? Is God saying something to you?

So next time you are in nature - be there! And be present to what God might say to you through it.

Then the well known verse '**Be still and know that I am God.**' Let's spend a moment with this. Sit comfortably and notice your breath. ***Be still and know that I am God.... Are you aware of anything changing in you as you were still and breathed in the awareness of God with you, in you, now?***

### **PPT 10**

What are *your* reactions when you find yourself in solitude and silence?

Instinctively many of us fill the space we do have with *noise* and activity. Can we be courageous enough to ask ourselves why we seek to escape silence? - is there guilt that I ought be busy?...

Might it feel scary to be just with myself? And yes sometimes there are things we need to face up to - but how freeing when I do, and find God's healing. Is God really a God who wishes to put his finger on your failings the moment you show up?!

Then there are the things we hold which are sometimes difficult to talk about. Several of us in this congregation have suffered deep losses recently. 'The love that triggers the pain of what we lost is at the heart of our broken heart. When we can come home to our own shattered heart and tenderly, lovingly stay there - in our profound grief we can experience the fragrance that begins to emanate from the very embers of what was burned.' (Miribai Starr)

Acknowledgment of own pain and vulnerability is the key to being met by transforming love. This fire of loss sweeps through the landscape of our heart, but what it leaves behind begins to shimmer as we sit with our grief and pain, enabling the veils to be lifted and access opened to a much more direct experience of being met by Love.

What if this God who loves us unconditionally just wants to spend time with us?

In silence we can learn to see ourselves more clearly - along with our relationships, and values.

In silence I learn to hear God's voice more clearly - I am making myself available to hear God and learning to be more attuned to how God speaks - whether it's through scripture, dreams, nature, an inner knowing, or simply through silence.

So how about practicing joining God in seeing yourself as God sees you and agreeing with God as God sees you?

### **PPT 11**

Is God inviting you to engage with some silence and solitude?

- The Friary in Hillsborough is a place I go to regularly to be quiet with God. They have monthly Time out days with a fabulous lunch included. Plus 24 hour retreats a few times a year.
- Spiritual Growth ministries has a website of retreats that are offered throughout NZ.

- Eamon and I are offering a 3 day silent retreat in November that has been advertised earlier. So see me if you are interested.
- Most retreats are themed with resources to choose from which help you engage with God.

## **PPT 12**

To conclude:

How does transformation happen? How do we grow in the fruits of the spirit?

How do we become more fully who we are as God made us?

A quote from Thomas Keating I find most helpful:

‘The chief act of the will is consent. To try to accomplish things by force of will is to reinforce the false self. Our will needs simply to ‘consent to God’s coming, consent to the inflow of grace.’

We have looked at spiritual practices which may help us open our hearts toward God and noticing the spiritual practices we have which are life giving for us. Maybe using some contemplative forms of prayer looking inward where we are learning to be more vulnerable with self and forms of prayer looking upwards where we just spend time with our God for we are God’s beloved.

So as we learn to behold God we will be changed!

2 Cor 3:18. And we all with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another’.

And then these practices will enable us to be more alive in the world participating in the community whether it’s for the holy calling of bringing up children, restoring creation, standing up for justice, assisting in humanitarian effort, being a good neighbour - becoming Love wherever we find ourselves.

## **PPT13**

Is there anything from this service that has touched a chord in you - where you sense an invitation from God? What is God’s invitation to you now? .....

Quiet space

Father would you create new hope and purpose in place of despair.

Lord Jesus, would you speak a word to shine light in the darkness

Holy Spirit, would you move over chaotic depths to bring transformation in seemingly impossible places.

Abba Father, loving creator and sustainer of all things. You are God for us.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, saviour of the world. You are God with us.

Holy Spirit, breath of God, bringer of holiness, peace and joy. You are God in us.