

“Habits that Hurt and Help in Becoming a Devoted Follower of Christ”

Sermon notes, 1.15.12, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL
2nd Sunday after the Epiphany by The Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge

Texts

John 1:50: Jesus said to Nathaniel, “You will see greater things than these.”

John 14:12: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”

I. Introduction: Habits that hurt

There are bad habits and there are good habits. According to the dictionary, a habit is a particular practice, custom or usage. Also, a customary use or practice, an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become involuntary.

Let me introduce you to some folks with habits that hurt them in their becoming a devoted follower of Christ:

Bitsy: Bitsy grew up in a family where she felt like her father neglected her when he let the older siblings live with him and she stayed with the mother. The bitterness has been part of her life for 25 years. She bad mouths him, tells all in the extended family how terrible he is. This grudge is eating her up. She has a hard time relating to men and those having authority over her.

Patrick: Is a good salesperson but has a habit of failing to complete orders correctly and of neglecting to understand the company standards and guidelines. He has been placed on probation often and never considered for a raise in the company.

Lawrence: Often called “lazy Lawrence,” for he has a habit coming to work late, is all talk and no action, never offers a helping hand, a has a habit of always asking for money when he is does something extra in the company.

Patsy: She seems to have a habit of always complaining to her family and colleagues at work because she wants everyone to meet her perfectionist standards. Her demeanor is arrogant and judgmental.

If we had a white board, we could list many bad habits in a column, such as lacking in personal boundaries, slothfulness, eating too much, staying up too late, personal prejudice, name-calling, apathy, and indifference toward spiritual matters.

II. Healthy Habits that increase our devotion to follow Christ

I recently read an article entitled 31 Ways to get Smarter and Faster. Three things to eat: Thai curries, dark chocolate, yogurt, drink coffee; use a 25-minute kitchen timer; use Wii with brain and hand coordination; write by hand. These can make your brain work faster and increase your speed.

What does Jesus say about increasing your personal growth and increasing your faith and acts of good works? In the Gospel today Jesus says to Nathaniel, “ You will see greater things than these.” Nathaniel states, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” He publicly acknowledges Jesus as Son of God and King of Israel. Then Jesus says you will see greater things than these.

John 14:12 says, “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes me will also do the works that I do and in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” Jesus is saying expect greater acts of compassion, greater acts of caring for others as we have trust in Him.

In the OT Lesson about Samuel and Eli, Eli was an old priest in the Temple, and his sons were also priests in the Temple. Samuel was a young man living in the Temple under the supervision of Eli. Eli is reluctant to communicate Yahweh’s message to Eli his Godly mentor. God said Eli did not restrain his sons when they were blaspheming God. We can assume from the text Eli as a father did not restrain the bad habits of his sons. Also, if they did these sinful things as young adults, we may assume they had no internal boundaries. They were taking things from worshippers that they were not supposed to take. Good habits tend to keep us from abusing others, engage in name calling, stealing from others; they help us live responsible disciplined lives.

In the Epistle, Paul ends this passage with, ‘Did you not know that our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit?’ Proper exercise and eating practices with healthy lifestyle habits tend to keep us healthy. Our bodies are a onetime gift from God. Thank God we have organ transplants in modern medical science, but we still have a body that is a gift of God.

III. What are the foundational HABITS THAT FORM US AS DEVOTED FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST?

In classic Christian Tradition these habits are called a PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE. In many Christian traditions they are called Spiritual Disciplines,

Growing spiritually,

Christian formation classes,

Faith development to live by,

Christian discipleship training,

In Islam they are called the “Pillars of Islam”;

In secular terms they are “healthy lifestyles.”

I like the metaphor that these habits of prayer, study, worship and service are behaviors that place us in a RECEPTIVE MOOD OR POSTURE TO RECEIVE WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO IN AND THROUGH US.

This is POSTURE THAT IS NOT A NEW LAW, NOT PUNISHMENT WITH IT.

The Rule is Invitational: Every member is invited to commit to a RULE or part of it. It is an invitation to deepen our relationship with Christ and His Church. It is not a checklist of laws by which you will be punished if you do not live up to them. A penalty is not attached to this RULE or part of it.

The Rule is Reasonable: It contains the essential for growing as a committed follower of Christ. God is always in the business of seeking a deeper relationship with Him. We are to respond to Him by seeking Him or placing ourselves in a posture so He can “dwell/abide in us.”

The Rule is Adaptable or Flexible: These practices are used in varied work and family obligations within a diverse congregation. Each person--old or young, male or female--should adapt to his or her particular situation. Many in this diocese and in many Christian churches are already doing more than the Rule. Do not be tempted to “compare” your growth with others.

The Rule is Foundational: Obviously it includes a maturity that includes prayer, study, worship, and service. The pastoral and lay leadership will make regular suggestions to encourage the members to adopt these habits.

A Rule of Life for Episcopalians in Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL

If you do not have a Rule of Life, begin to make small steps. Psychologists tell us it takes 40 days to integrate a new habit into an involuntary behavior or lifestyle.

Prayer: Think 12 minutes for prayer and study in 2012. The Triune God seeks a relationship with you. Carve out at time for prayer in the morning and evening. Use *Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families* in BoCP, 136-140 *Compline*, 127-135, *Prayers and Thankgivings*, 810 ff. A.C.T.S. is one way: Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving; Supplication: for church, world, those in need and yourself.

Passage of Scripture: Read a portion of Scripture everyday! *The Daily Office Lectionary*, BoCP, 943ff; or *Lectionary* for Sunday Eucharist may help organize your reading, 888ff. Read with an aid of a good study Bible. Use modern translations. Read and reread a portion until it “sticks” in your mind and heart. Let the nugget of truth speak to you though out the day.

Worship: Participate in Eucharist at least once every week, BoCP, 856. Corporate worship sustains your Christian life. If traveling on Sunday, find a place to worship. Spend time with fellow parishioners before and after you worship. Christian life is not a “solo” journey.

Study: Commit to participating at least once a year in a Bible study, spiritual study, or a Christian formation program with other Christians.

Dedication: Time, Team, and Treasure Here are three “T’s” in Maturity/Discipleship: Time with the Lord Jesus Christ in daily prayer or being a servant leader in your work or doing an unselfish acts of love.

Team: Serve on a team once a quarter on a project that serves those most in need. Join with others who minister outside as well as inside the congregation. Serve where we care and are cared for.

Treasure: Contribute at least 3 % of your income to the ministries of the church. Work towards a tithe or 10% of your income by becoming a better steward of your financial resources.

IV. Some Benefits of Living with a Rule of Life

Experiencing God on a deeper level: We are wired, created, with a basic human need to be in relationship with the Creator, Sustainer, Loving God.

We are happier to live with: Experiencing God on a deep level means we are living a more fulfilled life. We do not expect our spouse, our colleague at work, our friend to make us happy. We enjoy human relationships as we interact by not being “needy” or relating to others to affirm us or throw complements our way.

Live longer and release stress: Dr. Harold Koenig, Professor of Psychiatry at Duke, analyzed 2,200 studies. Those who give themselves to worship in a church or synagogue four times a month are less likely to engage in risky behavior, be depressed, or feel any chronic stress. In another study of persons who give themselves to others, they were found to have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, and a lower risk of heart attack and cancer. They heal faster and live longer. In a study of 20,000 church-going African Americans, they were found to live 14 years longer than their non-church-going counterparts. According to this Duke study, American church-going whites live 7 times more than non-church-going persons. I am not introducing helpful spiritual disciplines to improve your health, but to make us more effective devoted followers of Christ.

This will help us grow the church: Many Christians in America think of the church as buildings and facilities. Research indicates we consistently grow the church by **GROWING DISCIPLES. THE WORD DISCIPLE COMES FROM THE WORD DISCIPLINE.** The church grows as we grow in discipleship.

Obviously these are not all the benefits. There are more.

Closing: Remember the words of Jesus: “We will see greater things...we will do greater work by those who trust in me.” Let us members of Church of the Epiphany give Jesus some **12 MINUTE BLOCKS OF TIME IN MEDITATION AND IN HELPING OTHERS IN NEED.**

Prayer.....