

# PAPER CHURCH

## **Where Faith and Life Intersect: Society and Values**

*Sunday 17 May 2020*

### **Some Tips**

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

#### ***Get prepared for worship***

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

#### ***Get into a 'sacred' space***

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

#### ***Consider your environment***

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

## James 2:14-26

NIV

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

<sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

## Song: With All I Am

Into Your hands I commit again  
All I am for You Lord  
You hold my world in the palm of Your hand  
And I am Yours forever

Jesus I believe in You  
Jesus I belong to You  
You're the reason that I live  
The reason that I sing  
With all I am

I'll walk with You wherever You go  
Through tears and joy I'll trust in You  
And I will live in all of Your ways  
And Your promises forever

I will worship I will worship You

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## Song: May the Words of my Mouth

May the words of my mouth  
And the thoughts of my heart  
Bless Your name  
Bless Your name Jesus

And the deeds of the day  
And the truth in my way  
Speak of You speak of You Jesus

For this is what I'm glad to do  
It's time to live a life of love that pleases You  
And I will give my all to You  
Surrender everything I have and follow You  
I'll follow You

Lord will You be my vision  
Lord will You be my Guide  
Be my hope be my life and the Way

And I'll look not for riches  
Nor praises on the earth  
Only You'll be the first of my heart

I will follow  
I will follow You  
I will follow  
I will follow You

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## Message

*Penny Martin*

What does it mean to consider how faith and life intersect around society and values?

The trend of more recent years in Australian society has been to move actively away from religion as a defining feature of life. Greg Sheridan in his exceptional book “God is Good For You” says “Australia is about to become, if it has not already become, a majority atheist nation.” (p. 2).

We know and have probably read the many and varied reports on the decline of Christian faith in the West. I have read and taught and preached on the reality of the society in which we are living right now and continue to wrestle with the challenges of what it means to be a person of faith who wants to ‘contribute’ but I am perpetually faced with an indifferent or openly hostile response.

“In Australia the place of a credible Christian influence or voice is limited at best. Faith or belief is generally perceived as a “privatised” affair with ample opportunity to speak about, but little authority to meaningfully influence public policy, economics, education and humanitarian concerns. Recent McCrindle research into faith and belief in Australia highlighted a clear problem for Christian leaders when high numbers of respondents, 73 percent, reported that they are: “negatively influenced by the actions and behaviours of Christians in society.” Added to this, respondents report that the biggest stumbling block to engaging with Christian faith is the Church’s stance on homosexuality. What appears to be a broad perception about clear hypocrisy, as well as a lack of inclusivity and acceptance are particularly pertinent in light of recent cultural complexities in our nation, such as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, increasing focus on religious fundamentalism and radicalisation, the debate and plebiscite on Same Sex Marriage in late 2017, and media reporting on domestic violence in the Church to name just a few.

Christians have appeared to be judgemental, superior, close-minded, combative, lacking in unity, destructive, manipulative, hypocritical, unloving, unintelligent and irrelevant in many of the cases listed above.” (P Martin – doctoral excerpt).

This is by and large our societal landscape.

So what?

Sometimes the response to such a dismal and confronting reality is to become defensive, and sometimes it is to move quietly away and just get on with being a Christian ‘privately’ and not rocking any boats by what we believe and how we act.

*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society 1989, Lesslie Newbigin:*

“Christian affirmation ... cannot mean simply the affirmation of a way of personal salvation for the individual. It must mean this, and no less than this. To call men and women into discipleship of Jesus Christ is and must always be central in the life of the Church. But we must be clear about what discipleship will mean. It cannot mean that one accepts the lordship of Christ as governing personal and domestic life, and the life of the Church, while another sovereignty is acknowledged for the public life of society. It cannot mean that the Church is seen as a voluntary society of individuals who have decided to follow Jesus in their personal lives, a society which does not challenge the assumptions which govern the worlds of politics, economics, education, and culture. The model for all Christian discipleship is given once and for all in the ministry of Jesus. His ministry

entailed the calling of individual men and women to personal and costly discipleship, but at the same time it challenged the principalities and powers, the ruler of this world, and the cross was the price paid for that challenge. Christian discipleship today cannot mean less than that.”

This is the challenging space ... and I will admit an often overwhelming space. But the reality is that God has something transformative and life-giving to say to the world we live in, to the way we govern, the way we welcome, the way we include, the things we teach, the values we uphold, the way we communicate, the use of our resources, the care for the most needy and so many facets of what we would call public and civic life.

Jesus calls us as followers to not simply hear his words of life – but to put them into action. For example: Matthew 7:24 or Luke 8:19-21.

What are you starting to think about? Where are your thoughts going with this? What is being challenged/inspired in you?

We’d love to hear what you do/think, and we’re going to try to share using some technology, but if you’re not in the mood for that ... perhaps just think about it or jot some notes down to share in conversation at a later time.

But it’s easy ... use the Padlet link here:

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<https://padlet.com/rnqwd/175>

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Once you’re in the Padlet, click the pink plus button down the bottom right and add your own response, and read through others.

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*Key question for reflection ...*  
***“What’s one way that your faith impacts your actions/decisions in public spaces?”***  
*(e.g. politics, social media, education, economics, etc.)*

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And so ... the text from James today is critical to this topic. James makes it clear that faith without actions, faith without works can’t be faith at all. To be articulate and well-read without accompanying practical, loving action simply means I am but a clanging gong (1 Cor. 13:1) – increasingly lacking authenticity and relevance in today’s world. How does what we believe have any practical application to the society in which we live and the values we espouse?

“Sympathy must move to compassion, which must move to love, which must move to advocacy and action. Love without action is meaningless. Compassion without justice is hollow. Solidarity without advocacy is only half the picture.”

Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill, *Healing Our Broken Humanity. Practices For Revitalising the Church and Renewing the World*, 96.

These are powerful words that can guide us as we explore the relationship between faith and deeds and now is the time. COVID-19 has given society a glimpse into what people can be at their best. What Christians can offer with love and compassion ... we have been given a huge opportunity in these current times and I feel like we have represented the Kingdom of love with intention and really effectively.

Let us not become overwhelmed – but to consider these areas of faith and life more intentionally. Let us be challenged in perhaps one area, commit to small changes, and consider some practical ideas and responses as we attempt to stand at that intersection of life and faith.

There are many things we can be doing, reading and considering, here are a few ideas off the top of my head (and lets gather some more and resource one another):

- Get involved in “RASP” a group exploring Religion and Social Policy (a University of Divinity collegial group)
- Read up on Red Letter Christians or Preemptive Love and the ways that advocates and thinkers are responding to the intersection of life and faith
- Join a political party
- Sit on a local school council
- Consider shifting to ethically sourced products
- Commit to write letters and more intentional advocacy

What could you add in as ideas?

## Communion

*Have some food and drink prepared for this time*

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at [rngwd.com/communion](http://rngwd.com/communion) or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

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*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,  
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,  
and they all drank from it.*

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Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

## Connect cards online

*Click this link or enter it into your web browser [rngwd.com/connect](http://rngwd.com/connect).*

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

Thank you!