

The Church in Action?



When alone and having some free time, we might ponder what the Church is on about. As its members, what is our purpose, and what should we be doing?

Today the Church in Australia is not the most popular organization in town. Leaders have been found guilty of child sexual abuse and the Church seems no longer relevant to many people, especially the young. In past centuries, the Church has committed evil and violent acts such as the Crusades, Inquisitions, and persecuting innocent people. These acts sit alongside loving acts by the Church, such as that of St. Basil of Caesarea in the 4th century who began the first welfare centre and the first public hospital. Also, in the 13th century, St. Francis of Assisi risked his life to plead for peace during the Crusades, and respected and cared for animals. What loving actions are being done and need to be done today? How best can we follow Jesus and reveal God's love in our world? Does believing in God affect our behaviour?

The faith of Christians emerged from the Jewish religion in which people had a close and loving relationship with God. Made in the image of God, humans were to love God and their neighbours, and to connect with nature. To guide

their behavior, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Jesus expanded the meaning of these Commandments for his followers in Matthew 5-7. We are to be merciful, forgiving, and work for peace and justice. In particular, Jesus taught us by word and example that we are to love all our neighbours, including our enemies and nature.

As baptized Christians, we believe we are God's children, along with all people. This means we are connected to and accountable for all human beings, those we know and those who are strangers. It must matter to us when someone is homeless, in pain or has insufficient food. Our local churches respond to the varying needs of their communities, but where do we see ourselves fulfilling God's purpose in our daily lives?

Many of us who are members of the Church are aged and can no longer physically do what we once could, but we are still a vital part of the body of Christ in the world today. Our past experiences and a slower pace of life, can help us to discern God's love as more important and central to life than once we thought it was. We are no longer so upset when ignored, or are the target of other people's flashes of anger. In these circumstances, prayer enables us to bring the pain and people involved to God for healing. Such occurrences may help us to learn how better we can love others, serve them and be gentle with them.

Each day, whatever our age, we have the opportunity of helping and being helped by one another through our relating face to face, by email, Facebook, telephone or letters etc.. Each 'meeting' can be a vehicle for sharing God's love through the caring words we say or write, or by exchanging friendly looks.

When identifying the 'neighbours' we are to love, we are reminded by the meeting of COP26 in Glasgow of the seriousness of climate change for our planet, and that our 'neighbours' must include the whole of God's world.

In Luke 12, Jesus speaks of God's care and concern for birds and lilies. Not only people are connected to us and to be cared for, but all creation, animals, fish, birds, plants, trees and bushes, rivers, lakes, the sea, and the earth with its atmosphere, which we need to support our lives. Our planet is not to be treated as unimportant, to be used and eventually discarded, but rather, I believe, as something precious. Each member of creation, human and non-

human, is linked with others for better or worse. If we humans do not restrict carbon and methane emissions, our world will become uninhabitable for people and all life.

When we pause and quietly look at nature, perhaps at the ever-changing sea with its turbulent surf and gentle swells, we can become aware of not only the failures and brokenness that are parts of the Church's life and our own, but also the caring love.

By realizing God's loving presence in all the world, we open ourselves to embody God's desire to bring healing and wholeness to everything that is hurt and damaged. This can lead to acts of repentance, asking for forgiveness for the harm we have done to each other and the life around us, and to work towards its reparation. We all need to look for small and big ways to care for those suffering. We, as individuals, as the Church, as a nation, and as world citizens, are to show concern for people and nature by reducing our waste and increasing recycling.

As members of Christ's body in the world, we are to love and thank God for one another and this amazing and beautiful earth where we live. Along with everyone, we are called to participate in God's loving activity of transforming, not destroying, earth and all its inhabitants, human and non-human, into the 'new earth' (Revelation 21:1).

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November 2021*