

wanted was a bunch of rule keepers, Jesus would have stayed in heaven and sent the angels to whip us into line. In the end it's not that hard for God to get people to do what he wants. The challenge is to open their hearts to his love, creating people who love just like him, because it's who they are.

The church is not a bunch of rule keepers, but a people who trust Jesus with their lives, seeking to live openly and honestly with their Heavenly Father, because they know without a shadow doubt that he loves them. And

this relationship is a present reality as we live together with the person of the Holy Spirit, sharing life together.

This is what Jesus came to create, a living intimate relationship with the Father. A relationship of trust lived out today with the Holy Spirit. So now my life, our life together is an act of trust as we listen and share with God what our hopes and dreams are, and then set about living them.

The Holy Spirit is God with us now, so that

now we can be living together our hopes and dreams, forging a wonderful close intimate loving relationship.

Let us Pray.
Jesus send the Holy Spirit to open my heart and mind to you and your Father's will. Open my heart so that I can respond in love, trusting you with every aspect of my living. Jesus make me daily aware of the Holy Spirit's presence that I actively share life with him, listening and responding to what he is saying from you. Amen.

16 September 2012
THE TRAVELS OF PAUL
E100



This week our E100 readings have taken us on a journey through the Book of Acts as we've seen how the Gospel of Jesus has spread, often in unexpected ways.

The conversion of the Gentiles took people by surprise. But God confirmed it by pouring out the Holy Spirit on them. Another surprise was the conversion of Paul.

Paul was seeking to destroy the church, till he had a personal encounter with Jesus. That changed his life, and instead of breathing murderous threats against the church Paul is used to breathe life into people all over the world.

What changed Paul also reveals to me what is at the heart of the church;

a personal relationship with Jesus. God our heavenly Father is after an intimate relationship with his children, through Jesus, lived out today with the Holy Spirit. What lies at the heart of the church is a relationship.

Some of the early church struggled with this thinking that people also needed to follow the Jewish rules and customs, especially circumcision. So there was a dilemma; should the new gentile converts have to submit to the Jewish rules and customs to be accepted?

When it comes to a relationship what rules and regulations do you need? When it comes to a close intimate relationship what rules and regulations must be followed?

Actually you can't bully anyone into a close intimate relationship. You can't force someone into loving you by shouting at them and condemning them when they get things wrong. A relationship based on rules and regulations is always oppressive. You're always under the shadow of failure.

That's why the 'Law' can never put me right with God. It just sits there threatening me if I get it wrong. I can get it right ninety nine times out of a hundred, but that one time I transgress the law will come down on me like a ton of bricks.

Let's hear Peter's response to this dilemma that the early Christian community faced. "God, who

Christ Church Lutheran

Worship Times - 9.00am & 10.45am
Pastor: Tim 0427326553



Jesus' disciples multiplying disciples

knows the heart, showed that he accepted the *Gentiles* by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now them, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestor have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” (Acts 15:8-11)

Peter is reminding the early community of faith that you don't create, let alone grow faith, by a prescribed set of rules. You don't have a close intimate relationship with God the Father by seeking to be successful at proving yourself.

How do you grow an intimate relationship of love?

In acts we read of Paul going all round the world telling people about Jesus. That this Jesus is the Messiah you are looking for. Jesus is the person who brings us into a personal, loving, intimate relationship with God so that we call him, 'Abba' Father.

**Relationships
are for
Living**

And relationships are for living. Rules are for keeping you inline.

So Paul and the early Christians went out and made 'Disciples'. People who knew Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, that they might share life together. That through this shared history they might grow closer to each other and that this relationship might grow to ever greater maturity.

There is a vast difference between living a relationship and keeping rules. I think this is why the early church was able to go viral, and was unstoppable. Because once you were introduced to the Father, through the Son, and began living out this relationship in the Spirit, you had it all.

Paul could move on, and the people still had God with them in the person of the Spirit. So Paul was helped by persecution, because each time he introduced people to Jesus, some entered this relationship and began living it with the Spirit. Then Paul was kicked out, but the Spirit wasn't.

What did Paul do the very next town he came to? Introduce people to Jesus, some accepted this relationship and began living it with the Spirit. So that they now

could introduce Jesus to whoever they meet, and some of them accepted this relationship and began living it with the Spirit. So that they now could introduce Jesus to whoever they meet, and some of them accepted this relationship and began living it with the Spirit.

Paul may have been taken out of the picture a long way back in this family tree, but the living intimate relationship Jesus creates with the Father lived out with the Spirit was alive and well. Because we are called into relationship with a 'Living God' not a static set of rules we have to obey.

That's why prayer is essential to a healthy Christian life; because a healthy relationship is based on people sharing their hopes and dreams with each other. And we can share from the heart

with our Father, because we know for certain in Jesus we are his children, whom he loves and delights in. So we can be open to be lead by him, knowing he does share with us what is on his heart and soul.

Because we have a 'Living God' and not a

**We have a
Living God**

set of rules, we can expect a reply. In fact God in Jesus is more keen to share himself than I am. I'm still timid. That's why we have that wonderful gift of confession. This isn't designed for me to admit how bad I am.

When I confess anything to God I'm not telling him anything new. What I'm doing is being open and honest with him. I'm risking being real and not putting up a nice facade

I hope he'll like. Putting up a facade doesn't grow intimacy. Letting someone see into me grows intimacy. I can trust my Heavenly Father enough to be real with him and share with him my hurts, my frustrations, my failures, my blatant mistakes, knowing in Jesus I'll always be received as his child, whom he loves and delights in.

In this shared relationship of honesty we grow greater trust and intimacy, for we're not hiding from each other, or bullying to get our own way. In Jesus we have that amazing relationship of grace, of God giving himself freely for us, so that we can be living openly and honestly together in a wonderful intimate caring and loving relationship.

That's what God has gone to all this trouble to create. If all he