

ARE WE READY FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS?



Readings:

1 Peter 1 verses 22 to 25

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth (through the Spirit) so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

For "all people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Isaiah 40 verses 6 to 8

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

Psalm 51 verse 10

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Introduction:

An anniversary is a chance to look back and remember the milestones, hear the stories, and recognise the contribution people have made over the last 50 years. And I'm looking forward to our celebration after the service.

Anniversaries are also an opportunity to get carried away with what we have accomplished. On the 3rd of October last year, I planned an epic celebration of our first birthday at Storicom.

It started with breakfast in the same cafe that we started the business in on day 1 and ended with an extravagant dinner with our wives to thank them for their support over the difficult but prosperous first year in business.

The thing I didn't expect, was how pleased and proud I was of us, for making it that far. The stats are pretty damning - many businesses fail within the first year. But not us. No, not Storicom. We had done it, Jonathan and I had beaten the odds and survived.

A little bit ironic really - given that we both know in our heart of hearts that Storicom is a gift from God. He brought us together, and he blessed us. And we congratulated each other.

To say the next 6 months have been incredibly difficult - is a significant understatement.

It was as if the face of our Lord turned away, and just for a second, but everything changed.

"Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline, so be earnest and repent."

God is more interested in our character than our comfort. I'm sure you'll understand me when I say that I have spent way more time on bended knee this year than ever before ;-)

One of the epistles that really struck home with me earlier this year, was Peter's first letter. And when the opportunity came for me to share with you, I instinctively knew that it had to be from 1 Peter 1.



But, despite a huge amount of effort, I was just not able to grasp why, and how.

Until five nights ago. And just for a moment, the veil was pulled aside, and I understood the relevance to me, and the 3rd of October, and to us all, and this 50th celebration.

“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For all people are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

Today, we celebrate the word of the Lord in Glendowie, for the past 50 years, for today and for the forever to come.

Ergo, anniversaries are also an opportunity to look forward.

And in light of “the imperishable seed” and the “endures forever” - Peter is very clear in his instruction to us as we look forward. He instructs that we “love one another deeply, from the heart”.

I think that in the light of eternity, Peter is telling us to invest in relationships, relationships that will survive forever. After all, it’s the only thing we can take with us.

References: Revelation 3:19 | 1 Peter 1:23-25 | 1 Peter 1:22

Why should we listen to Peter:

Highlight reel

The late Chuck Missler said: “You can’t help but love Peter. He was the most lovable of the disciples: bold, candid, human.” And it is this human-ness that resonates with me.

He was an outspoken and ardent disciple, one of Jesus’ closest friends, an apostle, and a “pillar” of the church. Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, suffered from foot-in-mouth disease.

In several instances, Peter shows his humanity.

- For example, it was Peter who left the boat to walk on the water to Jesus – and promptly took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink.
- It was Peter who took Jesus aside to rebuke Him for speaking of His death – and was swiftly corrected by the Lord.
- It was Peter who suggested erecting three tabernacles to honor Moses, Elijah, and Jesus – and fell to the ground in fearful silence at God’s glory.
- It was Peter who drew his sword and attacked the servant of the high priest – and was immediately told to sheath his weapon.
- It was Peter who boasted that he would never forsake the Lord, even if everyone else did – and later denied three times that he even knew the Lord.

For all his strengths and failings, the Lord who chose him continued to mold him into exactly who He intended Peter to be.



Peter was part of the inner circle, along with James and John (the sons of thunder) - the only three present when: Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus, and when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain.

And, Peter and John were given the special task of preparing the final Passover meal.

Jesus' promise that Peter would be foundational in building the Church was fulfilled in three stages:

1. Peter preached on the day of Pentecost.
2. He was present when the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit.
3. Finally, he was summoned to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius, who also believed and received the Holy Spirit.

In this way, Peter "unlocked" three different worlds and opened the door of the Church to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.

A CV that demands respect.

References: Matt 14:28-30 | Matt 16:23 | Matt 17:4-6 | John 18:10-11 | Matt 26:33, 26:70-74 | Mark 5:37 | Matt 17:1 | Luke 22:8 | Acts 2 | Acts 8 | Acts 10

Letter

Evidence points to the letter being written from Babylon, after the martyrdom of Paul.

There was a large colony of Jews in Babylon, and as Paul had gravitated to Rome in the West, so Peter 'the apostle to the Jews' gravitated to Babylon in the East.

Interestingly, Peter addresses the letter to churches that owed their foundations to Paul, and we find that he is striving to assist and encourage them after the 'apostle to the gentiles' had been taken away.

Peter is trying to counteract the influences of a form of social persecution, against those who are tempting the followers of Christ to live impure lives. He is fulfilling his request by the Lord to strengthen his brothers and sisters right up until his dying day.

Invest in relationships:

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth (through the Spirit) so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.” 1 Peter 1:22

I find it odd when comparing with the KJV, that the NIV leaves out “through the Spirit” from this verse - especially after verse 2 deliberately refers to the “sanctifying work of the Spirit”.

As discussed earlier - I believe Peter is instructing his brothers and sisters to invest in relationships, and not the glories of man which will fade like the flowers.

But, the ability to do this is achieved by firstly cleansing oneself by obeying the truth.

“Obeying the truth” is something that’s really easy to read without realising the weight of its importance.

I read the start of an article last week, in which the author was contrasting how in her 20’s she loved going out every night and meeting new people; but now that she is in her forties it’s just too much hard work to invest that amount of effort in someone you’ll probably never see again.

Similarly, the instruction to “love one another deeply” scares me - I can fit you in every second Wednesday night for a couple of hours but you’ll need to buy the beer ;-). Seriously though, can purifying myself by “obeying the truth” unlock this ability for me?!

The difference between listening and obeying

I have the most amazing girls, they are 7 and nearly 4, and I love hanging out with them at the moment. My only complaint is that they just don’t listen to me.

I mean, I simply don’t understand why I need to ask 3, 4, 5 times before something gets done. Parents around the world nod empathetically ;-)

In a moment of self-reflection, only very recently, I realised that I am complaining about the wrong thing. The reason I get upset is not because they won’t listen, but because they won’t obey my commands - I mean how dare they?! Don’t they know who I am!

The thing is - expecting children to obey is not developmentally appropriate. Do we really want our children to mindlessly obey anyone who seems to have power in the future? No.

Peter, however, doesn’t get the difference between listening and obeying mixed up - this instruction very clearly means for us to be obedient.

Water baptism (story of obedience)

In 2002, we moved to London and started attending Holy Trinity Brompton, as most who had do the Alpha course does. Initially it was fun catching the tube into Knightsbridge for church every Sunday afternoon, but slowly the appeal of the church within our community of Southfields moved us down to St Mikes.

I'll never forget my first Sunday service at St Mikes, because I was very pleased to see there wasn't a baptismal font.

You see, I grew up in a Baptist church, and for one reason or another, I had decided that I could be a Christian without being water baptised. (If Christianity was about my relationship with Jesus "go into your room and pray" then why did a public statement matter?!)

So, having found there was no bathtub in this Anglican church was very encouraging. Before the service had started, I turned my face to God, and said: "Lord, if you want me to get water baptised, it needs to happen in this church!"

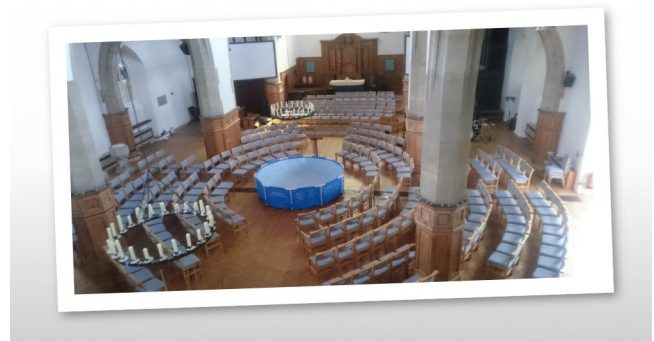
Presently, Steve the vicar of St Mikes, stood up to welcome everyone in, and then went on to announce that he had hired a big tub in a months time for anyone who needed to be baptised.

You gotta be kidding me right?! **I was very clearly being called to obey.**

So, I got water baptised a few weeks later.

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

References: Luke 11.28



What is truth

Quid est veritas?

Early one morning, a little under 2,000 years ago, a man sarcastically uttered the words: what is truth.

He had most likely just been dragged out of bed to be harassed by a bunch of angry and desperate leaders of the local temple, demanding that he execute their prisoner. Just as the rooster crowed for the third time that morning.

A prisoner who, he most likely knew, had just faced several illegal trials constructed on a network of lies and false witnesses. A prisoner who, he now had to sentence to death to keep the peace of the growing unrest from the onlookers.

He summons the prisoner inside and asks: “are you the king of the jews?”

“Is that your own idea,” the prisoner asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

“Am I a Jew?” he replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

The prisoner said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

“You are a king, then!”

The prisoner answered, “You say that I am a king. **In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.** Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

“What is truth?” retorted Pilate.

The Greek word for “truth” is aletheia, which literally means to “un-hide” or “hiding nothing.” It conveys the thought that truth is always there, always open and available for all to see, with nothing being hidden or obscured.

The Hebrew word for “truth” is emeth, which means “firmness,” “constancy” and “duration.” It implies an everlasting substance and something that can be relied upon.

Jesus told Pilate he came to testify to the truth.

Now, Jesus could have chosen any one of a thousand bible passages to explain his life purpose. He is the Sacrificial Lamb, the Root of Jesse, the Morning Star.

But, at the opening moment of his ministry, he reaches back to a four-hundred-year-old prophecy to tell us why he’s come. He quotes from Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has



sent me to bind up the **brokenhearted**, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

John Eldredge, in his book *Waking the Dead*, paraphrases in plain language:

God has sent me on a mission. I have some great news for you. God has sent me to restore and release something. And that something is you. I am here to give back your heart and set you free.

The heart is the deep center of our life. “The innermost part of the human personality,” says James Houston, “the center of those qualities that make us human.”

Our heart is our most treasured possession.

- Without your heart, you cannot have God.
- Without your heart, you cannot have love.
- Without your heart, you cannot have faith.
- Without your heart, you cannot find the work you are meant to do.
- Without your heart, you cannot have life.

Our hearts need to be set free so that we can invest in relationship:

- With God (love the Lord your God with all you heart...)
- And with each other (love one another deeply, from the pure heart...)

References: John 18:33-38 | Isaiah 61 / Luke 4 | Luke 10:27

Healthy relationship investment

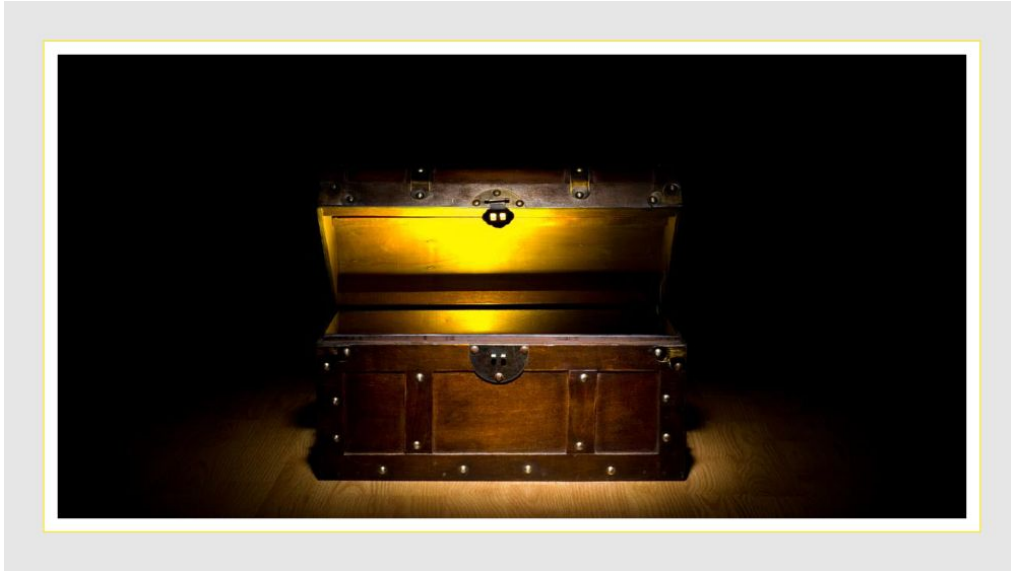
What does healthy relationship investment look like?

Let us not love with words of speech, but with actions and in truth. (James)

Love has been described as “something or someone to which they are deeply committed and greatly value; a condition of absolute value”.

Relationship investment is convincing and/or confirming a person’s value. Acknowledging someone’s value fulfills a profound psychological need. We all crave to know we’re valuable right?

3 actions which demonstrate value are: acceptance, accountability and affirmation.



Acceptance.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever** believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. This is how much God valued the world: he gave his one and only Son. To save the world through Him.

He accepts me. Enough to sacrifice himself to save me.

We are called to accept.

References: John 3:16

Accountable.

Put this money to work, he said, until I come back, he said. Because, when he returns, he will send for you, in order to find out what you have gained with it.

In healthy relationship investment, accountable doesn't mean I'm holding you to account every time you drop the ball butter fingers, it means I am accountable to you. I am not going to leave you behind.

The marine corps' warrior ethos describes this point well: Saepius Exertus (Often Tested), Semper Fidelis (Always Faithful), Frater Ininitas (Brothers Forever). Leave no one behind.

"Those whom I value, I rebuke and discipline."

He values me. Enough to not leave me behind.

We are called to account.

References: Luke 19:15-27 | Revelation 3:19

Affirmation

In the greek, the word 'therapeia', from which we get therapy, was used in the sense of "walking with", and the word 'compassion' was used in the sense of "to suffer with".

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"

Last month Graeme shared with us how the father of the prodigal son was "filled with compassion" because his son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost and is found.

Affirmation means to validate - and the father immediately re-confirms his son's position with the robe, ring and sandals.

The Spirit I received brought about my adoption to sonship. Because he values me.

We are called to affirm.

Reference: Romans 12:15 | Luke 15:20 | Psalm 23:4

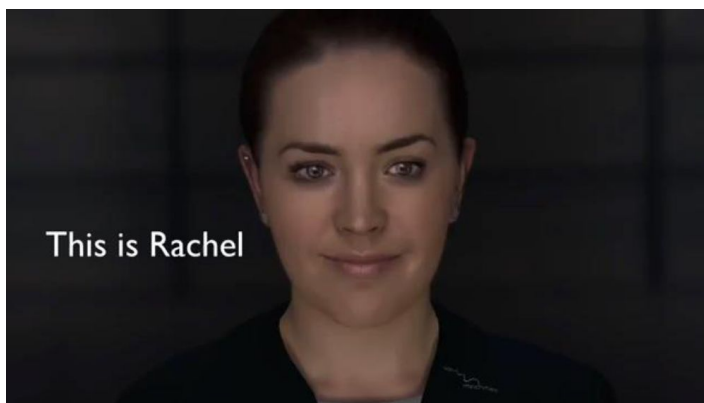
Looking forward

Within the next 5 years there will be robots in our workplaces. Robots that will share our work, robots that will learn from us, robots who will want a relationship with us.

And if you're counting your blessings that work is over for you, the biggest trend in old age care around the world is robot companionship.

Robots are powered by artificial intelligence. The profound difference with AI is that the computer or machine is not programmed but taught. (Algorithm versus heuristic).

The IQ of a 6 year old is approximately 57; the current IQ of AI is 46.



AI is currently learning from big data sets. For example, Bravo Oscar Tango, or Oscar for short is Air New Zealand's conversational AI bot. Oscar is just over a year old, and is currently having a thousand conversations a day with people travelling or looking to travel.

Over the last year he has increased his correct answer percentage from 25% to 75% of all questions asked.

The rate at which machines are learning is accelerating:

- some of you may remember IBM's Deep Blue that studied chess moves of all the great chess players and in 1996 defeated world champion Garry Kasparov.
- And more of you should remember IBM Watson beating top human champions at Jeopardy! in 2011.
- But probably only two or three of you will know that IBM's Project Debater beat the 2016 Israeli national debate champion, Noa Ovadia, in a debate held on Monday last week.

Just think about that for a moment. An AI system engaged with an expert human debater, listened to her argument, and responded convincingly with its own, unscripted reasoning to persuade an audience to consider its position on a controversial topic.

The pillars of artificial intelligence are for a machine to be able to understand, reason, learn and interact.

Since 1942, people have been teaching machines how to **interact and build relationships** with humans. The first law of robotics is: "A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm."

A month ago, IBM CEO Ginni Rometty called on developers to embrace responsible AI principles: "data belongs to the person who created it, AI must be transparent and explainable, and it should be used to "augment human intelligence, not replace it."

#AIforGood is an initiative being supported worldwide by companies investing in AI research and development, the mission: to make the world a better place through AI.

And there are some brilliant initiatives in education, the environment, in healthcare and accessibility where AI is changing lives and spaces for the better. In the workplace AI is being used to replace the dumb, dirty and dangerous jobs to make for a healthier and safer environment.

Despite all the good initiatives in play, there's a pressing need to find a moral compass to direct the intelligent machines we're increasingly sharing our lives with.

But, who is responsible for teaching machines about relationships, and morals, and ethics?

The front line developers. Ethics hasn't traditionally factored into the training of computer engineers. Understanding hard science alone isn't enough when algorithms have moral implications.

As emphasized by leading AI researcher Will Bridewell, it's critical that future developers are "aware of the ethical status of their work and understand the social implications of what they develop."

Ryan Holmes suggests that on a deeper level, responsibility rests with the organizations that employ these developers, the industries they're part of, the governments that regulate those industries and – in the end – us.

Right now, public policy and regulation on AI remains almost nonexistent. But concerned groups are raising their voices. Open AI – formed by Elon Musk and Sam Altman – is pushing for oversight.

Tech leaders have come together in the Partnership on Artificial Intelligence to explore ethical issues. Watchdogs like AI Now are popping up to identify bias and root it out.

What they're all searching for, in one form or another, is an ethical framework to inform how AI converts data into decisions – in a way that's fair, sustainable and representative of the best of humanity, not the worst.

This isn't a pipedream. It's happening now. In New Zealand.

What “code” are these developers going to choose to base this ethical framework on? Buddhist ethics? The Koran or the Gita? Or maybe the work of Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, or Descartes?

What about the Bible.

Are we sufficiently demonstrating the ability to love each other deeply from a pure heart, sufficiently investing into relationships, sufficiently witnessing the truth for the Bible to be seen as the answer?

