

TEACH ONE ANOTHER David Turner, All Souls

[00:00:00.580] - Speaker 1

Colossians 3:16, let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through Psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. One another. It's the theme of this new evening series. Here's the verse again from the paraphrase, the message. Let the word of Christ, the message, have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense and sing. Sing your hearts out to God. It's been good to get back to singing in the last few weeks. Church was never intended to be the spiritual equivalent of a spectator sport, where we watch what's going on and sample a little bit of what we fancy and mentally award performance ratings to a good show. A sort of spiritual Olympics, where the sports elite do their stuff on the screen and the rest of us look on in admiration. Our remote lockdown services were an absolute lifeline, weren't they? Literally, thousands of people across the world looked in some weeks. Dr. Luke became a global phenomenon. And All Souls had some lovely appreciative emails.

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I had a few myself after sermons, mainly from people I'd been at school with whom I hadn't seen for 50 years. One wanted to know when I'd gone gray. Another sarcastic voice from the past wrote, you're aging magnificently. What he meant was, you're putting on weight. In the Tony Blair years, we talked of sofa government. This was sofa church. And that was the problem. Jean sourced some magic cable which connected our iPad to the TV, and there we sat on the sofa. We were viewers. We didn't really sing. It was a struggle to concentrate sometimes. Minds wandered, but it was short, sweet, hassle free. No travel, no awkward conversations, no tearful people. Faith like this was all right. All the benefits, few of the costs. Oriented to comfort, autonomy intact, boundaries maintained, individualism expressed. I started to feel secretly to my deep shame that maybe I'd find the perfect church for me. And yet ringing constantly in my head were those words from Hebrews 10: 24 and 25, Let us consider how we may spur one another. It's that phrase again. On towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another all the more as you see the day approaching.

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There's something unique, irreplaceable about Christian people getting together. Things happen. It has a particular place in the economy of God who is in the business of change and who has placed us in a community of change which is of central importance to his eternal purpose. But change demands togetherness. You can't be in the body of Christ on your own. Change is always a community process. Coming to church or to a life group or to any other gathering is an encounter in which something happens. God is involved. The church, hard to believe, but the church is the most important organization on the planet. Christ rules the world for it. It's the apple of his eye. It's the passion of his heart. He was willing to die for it. With his own blood, he bought her and for her life he died. We sing, and if that's true, I should love the church, warts and all, and it should be central to my life. Being a Christian, by definition,

involves belonging to the Church, and that in turn means belonging to a particular church. And for us, that's here. Believing involves belonging. It's never an individualistic or an isolationist activity.

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It's a glorious privilege, but it brings responsibility. As a member of what John Stott like used to like to call God's new society. So how do we build up our common life effectively? Paul here in Colossians 3, as he unpacks the nature of Christian experience, gives us some wonderful clues to answer the question, why do we meet? That's my theme, really. Well, let's look at a little bit of the theological context, very sketchily. Verse 1, We've been raised with Christ and we've set our hearts and minds on Him. Everything we do orbits around Him. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. Verse 3. But, verses 5 to 11, there's a struggle going on as we need to put to death some distinctly ugly aspects of the old life. The Bible doesn't mince its words about what's required. Here it is to put to death, verse 5. Elsewhere, it's tear it out, cut it off, flee it. We can never make peace with our sin. Christians are new creatures with old habits. Then verse 12, the basis of change is what God has done for us. You see that? We're now God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

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And that's something he did for us. We didn't make ourselves holy. We didn't elect ourselves to the Kingdom of God. He drew us. His grace makes us who and what we are, dearly loved. Boy, there's no more powerful motivating force in our lives, no more secure identity than to remember we're deeply loved by God. Boy. To be the people we are and still be deeply loved is breathtaking. The qualities of verses 12 to 14, you remember them as they were read? They're our new wardrobe. They're God's designer labels for the new community. Seven beautiful, essential qualities wrapped around verse 14 by the ultimate all-purpose garment, love. And then even when chaos erupts, you're not thrown. Why? Because you know the peace of Christ, verse 15, ruling in our hearts. There's a stability and security that comes from knowing you are with one another in the body. The body is us, not it. Loved by God, defined by grace, safe in Christ. As Dick Lucas has written, "Where Christ rules in the heart, his peace will rule in the fellowship." Here's the context of verse 16. Here's a glimpse into really how the early church did church.

[00:08:04.860] - Speaker 1

It's the exact opposite of a spiritual theater or studio for the entertainment of the saints. No, it's a spiritual boot camp for people longing to become Christlike. I received advanced notice of a meeting this week which said it was to be IRL. I had no idea what that meant. I asked a colleague. Someone explained it means apparently in real life. Here's some of what we're doing IRL in the church. Here's the first thing, and there are three things. Here's the first, we meet to connect with God. Let the message, the word of Christ dwell among you richly. This is the only place in the New Testament that little phrase, the word of Christ appears. We know the early church simply couldn't get enough of the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. They loved it. Every opportunity, they were thinking about it and talking about it. And that's the sense, I'm sure. Here, surely, is a reference to the gospel the Apostles taught, and indeed to the whole of

the scriptures, which speak of Christ, are full of Christ, and which direct us to Christ. He's the one you remember from Chapter 1 Verse 17, who holds everything together.

[00:09:30.690] - Speaker 1

He's the heart. One of my very earliest memories of church as a child in London Derry was seeing the Burley Church caretaker squeezed into a frock coat, processing in from a side room with a simply huge pulpit Bible at the very start of every service, and then opening its pages dramatically. The symbolism was obvious. Everything followed on from the Bible. Well, the teaching and preaching of the Bible is an all and All Souls nonnegotiable. It always has been. There's one reason because it's Christ's word and it causes minds to animate, hearts to burn, and lives to change. Well, here Paul uses the word dwell. He's not speaking of an inert or static presence, but of a dynamic force that's operative and transformative among us. We're passionate to see the word of truth worked out in lives of truth. The Bible is never just educational, it's transformational. Meditation triggers application. We read it to be changed by the Holy Spirit. Paul's picture here is of the Bible being entertained as a house guest. Christ's word takes up residence in our life together. The you is plural here, all Christians. How do we entertain this particular guest?

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Answer richly. What will that look like? Well, we'll be a home where this guest is welcomed without reservation, given the run of the house, able to enjoy everything in it, not shoved away in some back bedroom. So, we say to God, we welcome your word here. Go anywhere, explore anywhere, do anything, have everything. The whole house is yours. We're at your disposal. We're Bible people. We come together in groups, big and small, on Sundays and through the week, to get into the Word, and equally importantly, to get the Word into us. There's no substitute for listening to God talking. That's what we're doing together as the Word is given the highest priority in its preached and proclaimed and explained and applied in everything we do in the life of the Church. We have in our hands here the very words of God translated into English, a book we can hold in one hand. It's an extraordinary situation. The creator of the universe, who sustains us moment by moment, has, according to 2 Timothy 3, breathed out a book in which he has, through human authors, uniquely disclosed his mind and will. The mind of God revealed in a book.

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A book we can read and love and memorize and meditate on. No other voice in the world can reach as deep, can lift us as high, or can carry us as far as this book. So, we need to recognize what we're dealing with and the Bible needs to be at home dwelling in our personal lives. And when we come together at a church or in life groups or whatever it is, we need to be reading and thinking about it at some point each day. It needs to be saturating everything we do and say and believe, shading every thought and decision. We need to understand it and to submit to it, not just the bits we like, but the hard bits. It's the very foundation for any teaching or admonishing we aim to do. And we ourselves need to aim to take as it's

put in 2 Corinthians 10:5, every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ. Now, gathering together reinforces that wonderfully. We meet to connect to God through the word of Christ. The Bible needs to be at the very heart of our life together. There's no substitute in a church for devotion to God's word.

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Sadly, the history of the church is littered with the wreckage of attempts to put other things first. Well, there's a second reason we meet. We meet to change one another. We're to teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. I think what has struck me here is that this is not a call primarily to the preachers and pastors. The capital T teachers of the Church. No, we know their special job. We know from Ephesians 4:12, their special job is to equip us, the people of God, for works of service and ministry so that the body of Christ may be built up to maturity to the fullness of Christ. And we're again thankful for that preaching tradition at All Souls. Long may it continue. No, here is the realization, and it's important, that the ultimate work of the Church has to be done by plain ordinary Christians like us. You can't do that from your sofa at home because it involves a thousand interactions when you simply pass on and apply what you've gained when you yourself have let the Word dwell richly in your life. That word teach is the one from which we get didactic.

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It's about instruction. It's about telling someone you're in relationship with certain facts you've learned yourself, things worth passing on. And the positive side is imparting truth. It's teaching. And the negative side is admonishing. Sounds a heavy, slightly scary word, but the sense is putting in mind, warning. What Ephesians 4:15 perhaps calls speaking the truth in love. There's a place for both. You teach someone about doing right, you warn them about going wrong. True encouragement is never afraid to tell the truth. But it's the word of God and not force of personality which does the heavy lifting of correction or challenge. It switches on the light. It gently deconstructs the dark places in our lives. And this is a million miles from power games or bullying or control freakery or anything like that. The loving friend is the one who tells you you have a problem and helps you with it. Proverbs 9:8, Rebuke a wise person and they will love you. 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul urges the Church to warn the idle, the disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everybody. And the only acceptable house style for any of this teaching or admonishing is there in Colossians 3:12-14.

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Those lovely qualities, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love. That's the house style, the only one that's acceptable. And you always ask for wisdom. That ability to take knowledge and apply it convincingly to what we call the real world. Plenty of us have knowledge. But at times we're a bit light on wisdom. That's the problem. And remember, Paul says earlier in the letter, Colossians 2:3, that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We're not on our own here. Now, of course, there needs to be trust and relationship and understanding one another's stories and commitment and affection for all this to begin to work. And we're working at that in this church

family all the time in a thousand different ways. And those little ways matter. Now, this exhortation in verse 16, you remember, if you glance back to chapter 1, verse 28, this is exactly how Paul formulated his own ministry, proclaiming, admonishing, teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. That was his calling here. And this is what struck me, I think. Here he extends the principle to every member. Here's our responsibility.

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There's no such thing as a mere church member. We're each called somehow to build and disciple one another. That's the theme of these talks that we're going to get into over the next few Sundays. And that doesn't mean we have to have the answers to everything. Of course, we can't. That's impossible. But it does mean we have a responsibility to be available as a means of grace through what we say to other believers. Ephesians 4, again, it's a parallel passage in many ways. Ephesians 4:29, the principle applied, don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit, literally give grace to those who hear. We're a reformed church. We love to talk about every member ministry. This is what it looks like. It's wonderfully countercultural. God can use our words for quite extraordinary purposes. Every time you or I enter the building, somebody here needs encouragement or challenge every time you come. What if I really believed that my words could deliver grace? Might I value the exchanges a little bit more? I mean, how often have you found that some verse shared or a sentence or a comment made after a service or in a chat or something has had a disproportionately lasting effect or influence to hold us steady and to encourage us.

[00:21:05.280] - Speaker 1

Don't waste your words when we're together, says Paul. Well, that's one half of the verse. The other half is, again, has struck me, I think, afresh. And that is that we teach and admonish one another when we're together by singing. It's extraordinary. Oh, you say it's only the singing we say as we arrive a little late at church. But singing is never merely a warm up to the main event of the sermon, let alone an atmosphere creator or a branding exercise for the music that All Souls does. I've been wondering over the last months why I've missed singing so much. I mean, at times it has almost ached to miss it, hasn't it? You felt that? It's not that I'm any good at it, but it's been a huge gap. Sunday by Sunday. Here's something of the reason. It's at the very heart of our teaching ministry. We actually teach one another as we sing. We're to be a singing people, not just a mouthing along with the words people. It's what Christians do. The scriptures resound with singing. There are something apparently like 50 direct commands and 400 references. God invented it. He commands it.

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We sing as an act of worship. We sing to disciple one another. We sing as a declaration to the watching world. Singing has built the Church down the millennia. It's a wonderful thing. We sing to God, about God, for God, and to one another. It's multifaceted. We sing to be heard by the Lord and heard by each other.

How often have you found hymns are echoing in your head long after the recollection of sermons is gone? As Jonathan Edwards said, "Such is our nature and frame that these things have a tendency to move our affections." The mind, the voice, the body, the imagination, the memory, the emotions are all involved when we sing. It doesn't get much better than that, does it? Singing together is one of the greatest teaching tools we have been given to declare God's goodness and strengthen the Church. That's Paul's point here, I think. We teach and admonish each other, not just through the Word, but through doctrinally sound, Spirit inspired songs of every kind. They really do change us. God's Word is productive. It's always productive whether it's preached, shared, or sung. I feel such gratitude here for all the music ministry.

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An extraordinary amount goes on behind the scenes. Song choices matter. It's hard work. We need to pray for our music ministry team because the theology of what we sing matters profoundly. You can sing rich theological songs even if you don't like them because somebody will like them. And if they're theologically on, they may be doing you some good because there may be truth in them which you can feast on in your hearts and minds. Listen to Keith and Christian Getty, "We sing because we're created to, commanded to, and compelled to. When we sing great truths, great things happen. Christ filled, Spirit prompted singing, moves out in concentric circles, changing your own heart and mind, changing your family, changing your church, and changing the world." Or from an earlier age, Luther, "Let God speak directly to his people through the scriptures and let his people respond with grateful songs of praise." And that theme of gratitude is unmissable here in these verses. We're grateful. Some of you will have heard of Horatio Spafford, who died in 1888. He was a successful Chicago lawyer and a Christian. He and his wife had a son and four daughters.

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At the peak of his professional success, the couple lost their son and various properties in the Great Chicago Fire. And in 1873, he decided to send the family on a trip to Europe that he planned later to join. And the ship foundered, crossing the Atlantic. And his wife telegraphed saying, "Saved alone". Their four girls had drowned. And he got on the next boat to come to collect his wife, to take her back. And he wrote that timeless, moving hymn we know, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul." Now it's only a person in whom the word of Christ dwells richly who can think like that in an unspeakable tragedy. And when we sing that hymn like so many others, we speak words of grace to one another. We want people, don't we, to leave every All Souls service, having heard the word of God in the mouths of the people of God. That's why corporate worship matters. That's why we can't do it from our settees. A singing church is harder to ignore.

[00:27:12.400] - Speaker 1

It's individual and corporate. It's cognitive and emotional. It's audible and visible. It makes an impact. Well, time is gone. Teaching one another. Why do we come to church? To connect to God, to change one another. Well, the passage ends with a third reason, but I've barely got time. It's this, we meet to live for Christ. The things we do together, especially on Sunday, are meant to teach us all to be whole life Christians on Monday. Verse 17, it's a great verse. Whatever you do, as John Stott used to say with endearing understatement, that's rather a lot. Do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. There's no sacred secular divide here. Sunday moves seamlessly into Monday. And what I've done and learned here today profoundly affects what I'll do and how I'll do it in court tomorrow morning. Whole of life is a sacred experience of living gratefully under the Lordship of Jesus, pervasively conscious of him. And we do that together. And that's worth getting off the sofa for, isn't it? So, to end, five little bullet points. Here's the first. **Be here.** Be here. This body needs you more than ever and more than you know.

[00:28:58.100] - Speaker 1

Second, **be a Bible lover.** Make it your pattern to have the word of Christ percolating through your mind every day. And third, **be vocal.** Let songs and hymns of praise sound from your lips and echo in your head as you go about your days. And **be thankful.** God is good. It's good to be together. And then finally, **c.** Ask good questions of one another. Be real. Be interested. Don't be phony. Don't put on some false piety, but never overlook the power of those small discipling teaching moments, the value of ordinary brief Christian conversations. They're not typically memorable, a lot of them. And no, most Christian conversations don't contain life changing wisdom, and they don't need to. But there may just be a tiny course correction which hardly registers. And on the other hand, every Christian conversation can convey something of Jesus and a Christian view of the world. And that's why it's worthwhile. And that's where some of our best work of teaching and admonishing one another is done. And by God's Grace, in just such a conversation, intentionally entered, you may just change someone's life. Let's pray as we close. Lord, our prayer for All Souls is that we may love you and your word, that we may by every means have the wisdom to teach and admonish one another through all those hundreds of conversations which happen across the life of this body.

[00:31:16.500] - Speaker 1

Our prayer is that our body here may grow and that we may leave every service and every small group gathering saying, the word of Christ dwelled richly among us today. We ask it for your glory. Amen.