

What's Up With The Three "R's?"

Someone asked me this question recently, and they did not mean reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. The person had heard members of this faith community talking about some "R's" and wondered what this was all about. We talked some, I explained some, and the person asked, "Could you put a summary of this in writing somewhere?" Yes, I can.

In October of last year I preached a Sunday morning message with the title "The Four R's." On our Annual adult retreat in January, we talked about faithful response to change, and how the "Four R's" can be spiritual tools for moving through change with God. These "R's" are one simple way to remember the Way of Jesus that helps us to seek first the Kingdom of God, to love God with our whole being, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Many people talk about "giving it to God," but few people talk about how one might actually do that. It is clear that Jesus "gives it to God," and calls us to do so as well, but how do we live it? The pattern we see in the life and ministry of Jesus and his disciples could be described as four "R's": *Rebuke, Repent, Receive, Rejoice*.

To *rebuke* is to choose to no longer live without God at the center of our lives. To rebuke is to name the brokenness, the falling short, to name that we want to leave that life, that old way. To rebuke is the act of choosing *against* that which is not God's Way for us.

A very basic example: I rebuke the temptation to live my way instead of God's Way.

To *repent* literally means to 'turn around.' To repent is to seek God, to invite God into the chaos and mess and emptiness that comes when we have been trying to live without God at the center. We ask God to come in, to heal, and to help. Also, to repent is to apologize, to say sorry for choosing my own way instead of God's Way. Repentance is the act of admitting we were wrong and then asking for forgiveness.

A very basic example: God, I rebuke my way and I'm sorry that I gave into the temptation to live my way instead of your way. Please help me to live Your Way.

To *receive* is to stick around and to wait for God once we have asked God to help us. This includes accepting the forgiveness God offers us when we repent. Sometimes we ask God for help or forgiveness, and then go about living without God, but expect God to just "magically" work in us while we pay attention to other things. Receiving is choosing to remain awake to the presence of God, to listen, to meditate, to seek God's word in prayer and Scripture and through other disciples, to let God's presence and word into our lives.

A very basic example: God, I rebuke my way and I'm sorry that I gave into the temptation to live my way instead of your way. Please help me to live Your Way. At this time, I'm going to be still and be silent and let you speak to me about whatever it is you think I need to hear right now. Please give me ears to hear with.

To *rejoice* means to express gratitude and praise for God's healing presence and power in us, and to shine God's presence in the world through our words and our actions. To rejoice is to live into the truth of what we have received from God, to live free because we are no longer enslaved to our old ways of living that resulted in alienation, isolation, loneliness, and despair.

A very basic example: God, I rebuke my way and I'm sorry that I gave into the temptation to live my way instead of living your way. Please help me to live Your Way. At this time, I'm going to be still and be silent and let you speak to me about whatever it is you think I need to hear right now. Please give me ears to hear with.

[5 or 10 or 15 or ___ minutes pass, then...]

God, thank you for the gifts you have given me. Gifts of forgiveness. Gifts of love. Gifts of others. You are good and so are your gifts. May I, too, be your gift to others this day.

Jesus lived in the last two "R's." He lived *receiving* God and *rejoicing* in God in all circumstances – and we see the healing, the peace, the joy, and the love that flows through him. We are called to live in receiving God and rejoicing in God, too. But Jesus knows we do not always do this, and so we have been given these discipleship tools of *rebuke* and *repent* to help reorient us so that we can *receive* and *rejoice*.

Here is one way I have experienced this way of discipleship in a typical day: I have read the Bible, prayed, and meditated early in the morning (*receiving* from God). I head to the church building, and find multiple e-mails and phone messages awaiting me, most requiring more from me than a quick response. I have groups to lead, where we will discuss hard questions of life, death, fears, morality, etc. I have people coming to see me to talk about difficult things in their lives. I also have people complaining to me about little things, often to avoid dealing with the difficult things in their lives. And I can start to feel overwhelmed. As I feel overwhelmed I realize I am outside an "R" – I have stopped *receiving/rejoicing* in God. And so I *rebuke* the ways I am thinking, planning, moving without God. I *repent*, I turn to God in prayer and tell God what's going on. I invite God into my thinking, planning, and moving. And I take a few minutes to be still, to listen, to *receive*, to breathe in the breath of God. And then I give thanks, and choose to move forward sharing and shining God's presence – I *rejoice*. I do not always remember to do this. Sometimes I resist and choose to not follow in the Way of Jesus. But when I do, usually the sense of being overwhelmed subsides. I experience connection, clarity, peace, and the presence of God. I remember that I am God's child - beloved by and belonging to God. And this is a good place to be.

I invite us all to try out the "Four R's" as part of the path of discipleship. Please share with me and with one another how it is going. I trust that as we do, we will more and more live into the truth of the Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God, and we will more fully love God, our neighbors, and ourselves. Come and see.

Love in Jesus,
Pastor Michael Bush