

Reflection - 4th Sunday after Pentecost
28/06/2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 22: 1-14	Abraham is prepared to sacrifice Isaac
Psalms 13	A prayer for Help
Romans 6: 12-23	Slaves to Righteousness, Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ
Matthew 10: 40-42	Whoever helps the least of my servants will certainly receive a reward

Introduction

Our sentence of scripture for today, comes directly from our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans:-

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6.23

Today I would like to look at these two parts of the sentence, firstly death and sin, secondly the free gift of eternal life, and then, in the light of all of the bible readings we have had today, consider what this means for our lives, here and now.

The wages of Sin is Death

If we think about these words "the wages of sin is death", it sounds like something from a horror movie. It sounds very dark. But what Paul is describing is merely the reality of our human condition. A little earlier in the letter Paul writes, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

Sin is an integral part of the Christian World View. In Christianity there is at the centre of our world a Creator God, who made and loves all that is, and as human beings we are the pinnacle of God's creation on earth. But as we look around we know that we are not perfect, we know that we often want to do what we want, and not what God wants, and this is what we as Christians call sin. So in the Christian world view we all sin.

This of course is quite different to the secular postmodern worldview, where everything is relative. In this there is no overarching big story to describe our world, rather we are free to develop our own morals and ethics.

The Christian worldview which acknowledges our sin does not mean that we have easy answers to all of life's difficulties, but it does mean we have a much better way of understanding and handling the complexities of life before us.

The Christian worldview tells us that we all sin and it leads to death, so what hope do we have, you might ask? Well this brings us to the second part of the sentence.

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

If we all sin, then we all need a saviour. The Christian worldview places Jesus at the centre. Jesus died so our sin could be forgiven, and in his resurrection we have hope for the future. Just as death was not the end for Jesus, death is not the end for us. This is the reality Paul eventually began to grasp on the road to Damascus, and what he has written about so eloquently in this letter to the Romans. Many scholars believe it reaches it's peak in Romans chapter eight.

It is the wonderful Good News the first Christians witnessed, and passed down the ages, so that here and now in 21st Century Australia, we too can have this hope. And notice it is not something we earn through our own efforts. It is a free gift. It is available to us by accepting what Jesus has done for us.

So if we accept this free gift, what does it mean for our lives here and now?

Living into eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord

Jesus told many parables about things being lost and then found, and the joy that this brings.

If we have experienced the Joy of Forgiveness, then we are called to live into it. Of course this living into it doesn't earn our forgiveness, the living into it is an expression of gratitude for something we already have. And whilst it is something that should be done joyfully, that does not always mean it will be easy.

Have you experienced the Joy of Forgiveness?

Those who have experienced this Joy are called to put all of our faith, all of our hope, and all of our trust in God. Putting God before everything else in our lives.

We see a prime example of this in the reading from Genesis today when Abraham is called to sacrifice his son Isaac. This of course is a horrific story for us to contemplate and it would take a long time to go into describing the culture of the day where animal sacrifice was a normal part of life, and child sacrifice was actually a part of some of the cultures of the area. We live at a very different time in history, but one thing we can take from this story is that Abraham remained obedient to God, and always believed that God would provide.

Do we always believe that God will provide for us?

Another example of holding fast to God comes from the psalmist today. Even though the psalmist is clearly having a tough time of it and not doing well in life, as we hear in verse one the psalmist says:-

¹ How long, O Lord, will you so utterly forget me:
how long will you hide your face from me?

In verse 5 we hear the psalmist say:-

⁵ Yet I put my trust in your unfailing love:
O let my heart rejoice in your salvation.
⁶ And I will make my song to the Lord:
because he deals so bountifully with me.

In tough times do we trust God like this?

With the Coronavirus Pandemic we are living in tough times. Are we putting all of our trust in God at this time?

Our Gospel reading today from Matthew chapter ten, goes on from this and says that those who welcome God into their lives and live it out, will not lose their reward. This should not be seen as doing good things will get you into heaven, but rather that welcoming God into our lives through Jesus, brings in the joy of forgiveness, and if we live into this we will be living into a life that leads to eternal life.

Conclusion

We see from our bible readings today that there are two ways to live, in sin following our own desires, which leads to death, or in accepting the free gift and living in joyful forgiveness, which leads to eternal life.

I pray that as we continue to live in a difficult and challenging world, where we are constantly reminded of sin and death, that we will hold fast to God.

And that as we remain obedient to God's will in all that we do, we will be continually drawn into the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.