

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
06/09/2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 12: 1-14 The Passover

Psalms 149 Praise the Lord, He will be Victorious

Romans 13: 1-10 Obey authorities, Love is fulfillment of the Law

Matthew 18: 10-20 Jesus warns about looking down on others
Jesus teaches how to treat a believer who sins
Jesus will be with those who agree

Introduction

The sentence for last week was:-

If you want to become a disciple of Jesus, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him.

In this we are challenged to look at ourselves individually. How do we personally react to Jesus?

Today's sentence reads:-

'Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name', says the Lord, 'I am there among them'.

Today we are challenged to look at what it means to be part of a faith community.

A long time ago the great Anglican priest and poet John Donne wrote:-
No man is an island, entire unto himself.

It is extremely unlikely, I would say almost impossible to live without interacting with others. As human beings we are social animals. We live and function in societies. Likewise it is only among other Christians that we can live out our lives as Christians. Today I would like to look into the readings we've heard from our sacred texts and explore how we are called to live within our faith community, with both a sense of order and a sense of community oneness.

Sense of Order

Firstly a sense of order, or what could also be seen as a call to obedience. There is much in the readings today which talks about order and obedience.

From Exodus we hear the story of the Passover. We hear how, through Moses and Aaron, the Israelites are given instructions on what to do at a specific time of the month. We hear how they are told to take a lamb for each family and how they are given special instructions for preparing it. We hear how they are to mark their doors with the blood as a sign.

As the story continues we hear how the Israelites obey these instructions. The firstborn of all the Egyptians die, but because of their obedience the firstborn of all the Israelites live. This is the event which finally persuades the Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave. Because of their obedience the Israelites were saved and eventually freed.

In Paul's letter to the Romans we also hear about obedience. Paul talks of being subject to Authorities, he tells us that we must pay our taxes, and give respect and honor to whom it is due. How often do we look down on those in authority when we should show respect? But Paul didn't place worldly authority over God's authority. He was in fact imprisoned and martyred for his faith. We must be obedient to worldly authority, but there may be times when this authority is totally opposed to God. On these rare occasions we might have to stand up and act in line with God's laws.

In Matthew's Gospel we get that sense of order when we hear Jesus give us a procedure for dispute resolution. This seems to be specifically looking at those within the Church. If someone wrongs us we are called first to try to resolve the issue with them privately. This can be a very difficult thing to do. If someone has upset us, it is easy for us to be angry at them, to avoid them, and to go and tell all of our other friends all about how bad they are. But we are called not to do this. We are called to be up front with our fellow Christians. Now this doesn't give us licence to be rude and arrogant to others every time we don't get our own way, but rather we should seek to resolve issues in a considerate way, as soon as they arise.

I think this is a big issue for us as a faith Community.

It's easier for us to go to the extremes:-

1. Ignore and not deal with an issue, because we just want to be "nice" or
2. Treat the other person badly

But we need to be honest with one another.

It is difficult, but it is worth it.

If the "one on one" approach doesn't work, we are then called to bring in witnesses. And if this still fails we are then called to go to the Church. Despite our best efforts others might refuse to be reconciled to us, and that is their choice, but we must remember, Jesus' priority was for us to remain as one.

Sense of Community Oneness

Let's now look at the sense of community oneness from today's readings.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, immediately after we hear about being subject to authorities, we hear a call to show love for one another. Paul says:-

Owe no one anything, except to love one another.

He talks of a number of the Ten Commandments and then says these are all summed up by this:-

Love your neighbour as yourself.

As Paul sees it to Love is to fulfill the law.

If we are able to achieve this we would certainly achieve a loving community.

Lets conclude by looking at this sense of oneness in Matthew's Gospel.

The reading begins with the parable of the lost sheep. Here Jesus is letting us know that we are all important to God. From the Least to the Greatest he wants us all to be one in his kingdom, and we are warned about looking down on others.

And after Jesus finishes on the dispute resolution procedure, he emphasizes a sense of community and how important it is to agree.

We matter to one another.

If no one except the minister turned up for a Eucharist service, then there would be no service. There would be no community with whom to break bread. Our faith is one of a community which acts together to carry out God's work.

Now a private spiritual and prayer life is essential for each of us, but it is likely to become dry and turn inward if it is not infused with regular doses of shared worship and connection with others, gathered in Christ's name, and for his sake. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

The gathering – the connectedness – magnifies the Holy Spirit for us, and in us, and with us.

Obviously there have been struggles to do this during the COVID-19 Pandemic, but there have also been new ways, and different ways that we have managed to be a faith community. Maintaining a sense of community oneness is something that can only be achieved by continually putting our trust in God as we come together.

Conclusion

Today Jesus makes it clear how important we are one to another.

When we celebrate the Eucharist, we stand and the minister says "We are the Body of Christ" and those present reply "His Spirit is with us."

We are linked to one another through Christ. This opens a power in our community, uniting the values of God, to our values here on earth. This is how Jesus enables us to use God's power for making us more effective among God's people. We come together, we stay together, we work together – We do all this in Jesus' name, bringing to focus God's presence and unleashing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We are to work together to transform not only our own lives, but also those with whom we share our lives.

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them".

Amen.