

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
20/09/2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 16: 2-15 God provides manna and meat in the wilderness

Psalms 105:1-6,37-45 Praise the Lord, He saved Israel in the desert

Philippians 1 Paul urges to stand up for the Gospel

Matthew 20:1-16 Parable of Workers paid equally

Introduction

Today's readings from the bible are mainly about God's overflowing love and generosity towards us. I'd like to explore how much we really understand God's love and provision for us, and then look at how we respond to this in our lives.

God's love and generosity toward us

Do you really believe God loves you?

I have heard two answers to this question that I don't think are helpful.

The first is "Yeah! Of course God loves me!" but it seems to have no impact on the person's life at all. – I think this is unhelpful because there seems to be no evidence that the person understands who God is, why they would even need God's love.

The second is "I hope so, I hope I can be good enough?" - I think this is unhelpful because it seems that the person is trusting in themselves to be good enough and not trusting God's love.

In the Christian faith there is the belief that God created the world, and God created us to live in a relationship with God. However, as human beings we want to do things our own way, and not God's way. This rebellion against God is called sin, and it is a part of who we are as human beings. Sin is a very misunderstood term in our society. Most people would think of something quite bad when they hear the word sin, and it is right to think this, but they probably don't realize that we all sin. At times, we all do things our own way and not God's way. We all fall short of perfection.

Now the consequence of sin is that it cuts us off from God's love.

But in God's love and mercy, God has provided a way for our sin to be forgiven, so that we can be reconciled to God. God did this by coming into the world, in the person of his son Jesus, to die on the cross, to take the punishment that our sin deserves. If we acknowledge our sin, say sorry to God, and accept what Jesus has done for us on the cross, then we can be assured of forgiveness, and know that we are not cut off from God's love.

The first followers of Jesus had this assurance not only because of Jesus' death, but also because of his conquering death in the resurrection. The resurrection showed them that even in the face of death, we can have hope because Jesus has overcome death.

In John's Gospel Jesus says:-

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16) and also
"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."
(John 14:6)

Our sentence of scripture for today from Ephesians says this, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

So God's love is not something we can earn, it is something which is offered to us as a gift to receive. But the big thing is we need to receive it.

And when we receive it, we can know we are assured of God's love. And we can have hope, not only in, and for, this life, but also in what comes after death.

We get a sense of how good this hope is in the opening words of our collect prayer today:-

Loving and righteous God,
your boundless generosity exceeds all that we can desire or deserve

To me, this hope through Jesus, is the most amazing thing in the world. Even in the face of death we can have hope. I believe this is why the message of God's love still goes out today, 2000 years after Jesus died and rose again.

Matthew 20:1-16

In the parable from Matthew's gospel that we heard today Jesus is giving us a glimpse of what it is like to be a part of his kingdom. Just as all the labourers who accepted the call of the landowner to come and work were paid the same, all who turn to Jesus and accept Jesus will be embraced by God's love. In one sense it seems unfair for those who worked the whole day, but they did not miss out on anything, they still received their reward. This is not a story about being rewarded for work though. This is a story about God's all embracing love for all, and how we can receive that love by accepting Jesus.

Philippians 1

We see this hope and knowledge of God's Love in Paul's letter to the Philippians this morning. In verse 21 Paul says

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

Death is not something in our society that we would usually associate with gain, and I don't want to downplay the grief and heartache that comes with death. But for those who

are secure in God's love, as Paul was, we can be sure that even death will not separate us from God's love.

This is a powerful hope, one that goes beyond our human understanding, yet one that Christians have experienced down the ages, since the first disciples of Jesus.

Our response to God's Love

So if we have turned to God, said sorry to God and accepted God's love for us in Jesus, what does this mean for our lives?

Firstly it means we are people who live with the most wonderful hope in the world. And it also means we are called to be disciples of Jesus, and follow Jesus in our lives.

Because following Jesus is a whole of life thing to do, I would just like to look at some aspects from Paul's letter to the Philippians today.

Philippians 1: 3-6 - ³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Here we see how Paul prayed for the Philippian church, knowing that they had begun to share the "Good News" that they would be enabled to continue. Holding onto one another and supporting one another is a big challenge for us, in a society which encourages individualism. We need to work together as a church to continue to share the "Good News" of Jesus.

Philippians 1: 27-28 - ²⁷Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.

It is a challenge for us to stand firm and not be intimidated, but it is something we are called to do as a church together.

Conclusion

In Jesus we can be assured of God's love for us. When we accept Jesus, we are called to live our lives for God, not for ourselves. I believe this fits in really well with our Diocesan Mission Statement on the front page of our pew bulletin:-

"Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, Making disciples and Growing faith communities."

The message of Jesus is "Good News". If we know how good it really is then we are called to take our part in helping those around us to know it too. Amen.