

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
04-10-2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20 Ten Commandments

Psalm 19 God's law is Holy, I want to keep it.

Philippians 3: 4b-14 I count everything as loss compared to knowing Christ
I press on towards the prize

Matthew 21: 33-46 Parable of the Wicked Tenants

Introduction

Today I would like us to look at what guides and directs our lives.

Today's readings cover quite a bit about how we are called to live our lives. Firstly we've had the 10 Commandments, which give us rules to live by. Then there is the psalm which talks about God's glory, and how wonderful it is to obey God.

The new testament readings are about how knowing Jesus, is the ultimate way to know and find peace, in the God who created us. Jesus tells the pharisee's a parable about how God has sent him, and in Paul's letter to the Philippians we hear Paul say everything else is rubbish compared to knowing Jesus.

So let us explore the readings today in the light of what is the most important way to live our lives.

How can we count everything as loss? Is everything we do based on Jesus?

Matthew

The gospel reading today carries the theme of the vineyard.

Vineyards, vines, grapes and wine were well known to the people of Jesus' historical time and place. Analogies with the imagery of the vineyard are also used throughout the old testament. Abundant harvests and crops were seen as a sign of God's blessing.

Here Jesus is using the analogy to give a message to the chief priests and the elders about who he is. Let us now look at how Jesus' message to the religious leaders is also applicable to us today.

Here we have a story of a landowner who has planted a vineyard. Again the landowner is God and the vineyard is Israel. The chief priests would have known the scriptures and would have been able to relate to this, but Jesus has added some new characters to the story.

Firstly there are the tenants who are leasing the vineyard and are charged with its care. These tenants are the Jewish religious leaders. They are charged with the spiritual care of the nation.

Then there are the landowners servants who are sent talk to the tenants. They represent the prophets and priests who remained faithful to God and preached to Israel. Just like a landowners servants many of the prophets were treated very badly for preaching God's word.

The landowners son is Jesus. Here Jesus is not only reaffirming that he has been sent by God, he is also prophesizing his own death.

Finally there are the new tenants. Here Jesus is foretelling that Israel will no longer be alone in worshiping God, and that Gentiles will be called as well.

So from this parable we know that Jesus is exposing the evil intentions of the religious leaders to kill him. But is there more? Like the landowner who sent his son, God has sent his Son Jesus to us. Again we are reminded of probably the most well quoted verse in the Bible – John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”

The way for us to come to God is through Jesus. Jesus is making it quite clear, that to reject him, is to reject God. So consequently to turn to him, is to turn to God, and to know God's love and God's peace.

Philippians

Paul's letter to the Philippians echo's these sentiments. Verses 7 and 8 emphasize our need for Jesus.

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

How does this impact our daily lives? Do we regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord?

I would like to share with you a story about what we love in life, or to put it another way – what we value. My father-in-law George loves going fishing. Looking after boats and equipment can be time consuming. It can be a bit labour intensive to keep everything in good working order. When George is preparing for a trip out he is often whistling. This is a sign to me that he is happy to do the work required to get ready, because he loves it.

Christianity is about knowing we are assured of God's love for us, through Jesus.

Knowing we're not perfect, and knowing that in Jesus we have a way back to God. We should follow the rules, not under duress, but because we want to.

The 10 Commandments were given, not to stop us from having fun, but to help us to live full and happy lives.

A number of years ago I attended a presentation by missionaries associated with the organization Open Doors. The main speaker was Johnny Li a Chinese evangelist who works for Open Doors. This organization supports Christians in countries where Christianity means persecution. Johnny spoke mainly of the persecuted church in China. He spoke of some very young and dedicated evangelists. These dedicated missionaries are constantly looking for opportunities to spread the gospel. In doing this they have to travel, but travel is expensive.

He spoke of how some of these young evangelists were actually selling their own blood to get the funds to enable them to travel to other towns and cities so they could witness for Jesus.

For them they were even prepared to literally give up their own blood, and count it as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ as Lord.

We can't sell our blood here in Australia, but we can ask the question, how does this inspire us, and what should we be doing to acknowledge all that Jesus has done for us.

Conclusion

In summing up what have we heard from the readings this morning?

From Paul's Epistle to the Philippians we have the affirmation that Jesus has been sent for us and that without him there is nothing. The psalm reminds us that God's way is the ultimate that we can desire, and we will find the best for us in God.

But it is the reading from the Matthew's Gospel which asks us to look at how we take the knowledge of Jesus into our own lives. We are asked to look at what fruit we are producing. As Jesus says to the religious leaders,

"The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

What sort of grapes will we produce this week? What sort of grapes will you produce this week?

Wild grapes that are trampled under foot? or good grapes that produce fine wine?

So that others might savour the taste of God's Kingdom. Amen.