

The First Sunday in Lent
21-02-2021
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 9:8-17	God gives the rainbow as a sign of his covenant after the flood
Psalms 25: 1-10	God protect me and show me your ways
1 Peter 3:18-22	Christ died for us. Baptism is a sign for us like the ark that came through the flood.
Mark 1: 9-15	Baptism of Jesus, Jesus in the wilderness Jesus calls people to repentance.

Introduction

As I was praying over the bible readings for today there were two themes that kept coming to me.

The first was about God's promises to us, and the second was about the need to spend time with God and how the time of 40 days seems to come up again and again in the Scriptures.

So, let us explore both of these themes today.

God's Promises

Firstly, let us look at what the readings tell us about the promises of God.

Who's ever made a promise? Who's ever had a promise made to them?
Sometimes we keep the promises that we make, sometimes we don't.

I wonder, has anyone ever broken a promise, that they made to you?
How did you feel? What did you do? What did you say?

Today in the Bible readings we hear how God make promises to us, as human beings. And we know that unlike us as human beings, God does not break the promises that God makes to us.

Firstly, in the reading from Genesis, we hear the story of Noah. We hear how God promises not to flood the whole earth again. And we hear how God gives the people of the day a sign for them to remember this promise. A rainbow will appear in the sky. From that time on they were given a visual reminder of God's promise to God's people. What a wonderful encouragement that must have been. God's people knew that Noah had been saved, and they knew that if they held onto God's promises then they too, would be saved.

And we know that much of what happens in the Old Testament prefigures what happens in the New Testament.

We hear in 1 Peter 3:18 today the great Christian promise:-

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

Despite our own brokenness, we can be in a right relationship with God.

Jesus brings us to God.

Jesus promises forgiveness.

Jesus promises to be with us forever.

And Jesus came calling all Humanity to live into this promise.

In our Gospel reading today we hear:-

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

God makes the promise to us, but it is something we are called to live into.

The Sacrament of Baptism is a starting point, and all who are baptized are then called to continue to live into the promises of God throughout their lives.

Living into God's promises may not be easy at all times, but it is the best thing we can do with our lives. In fact, it is what God has created us for!

40 Days

The number 40 appears throughout the Bible.

When I looked up Wikipedia, it said the number 40 as having great symbolic meaning to Jews, Christians and Muslims even today, and the number is used in terms of time, representing a period of probation and trial.

Following are some of the times we see 40 mentioned in the Bible:-

Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights on two separate occasions (Exodus 24:18, 34:1-28).

Jonah warned ancient Nineveh for 40 days that its destruction would come because of its many sins (Jonah 3: 1-10).

Ezekiel laid on his right side for 40 days to symbolize Judah's sins (Ezekiel 4:6)

Noah and his family were on the ark for 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:4)

Jesus fasted for 40 days 40 nights as He prepared for his ministry (Matthew 4:2)

Although the 40 days is often seen as a trial, it is also a time which can bring great benefits. I recall reading that 40 days is a significant enough period of time for us to either make or break habits.

So having the 40 days of Lent is a wonderful opportunity for us to draw closer to God. We do live in such a fast paced world though. If our relationship with God is to Grow and Flourish, then we need to take the time to be with God.

Our current Lenten Study, "The Old Testament on the way to the Cross" is a great opportunity to draw closer to God, and there are of course many other ways to do this.

The important and challenging thing in our lives though, is that we do make the time to be with God. We need to build the time for God into our lives. Like anything of value, it does not necessarily come easily. But when we achieve little steps along the way we can see the benefits in our lives.

Conclusion

As we go out from worship today, as we continue our Lenten journey, let us be mindful that God has promised us forgiveness. It is not something that we have to earn, it is not something we have to or work for. It is God's promise to us when we accept what Jesus has done for us. But it is something we are called to live into. And if we have accepted and know the power of God's wonderful promises, then we should want to live into them. As we begin our Lenten Journey, I pray that we will be enabled, to take the time, to live into the promises of God.

And I pray that as we live into God's promises we will know God's love and peace, flowing more and more, into our lives. Amen.