

The Fourth Sunday of Easter  
25-04-2021  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 4: 5-12      Peter filled with the Holy Spirit explains how the man was healed in Jesus' name and that salvation is only through Jesus

Psalm 23            The Lord is my Shepherd

1John 3:16-24      We do not love with words and tongue, but with actions and truth

John 10: 11-18    The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, And lays down his life for them

### Introduction

This morning I would like to look at three points from our readings which are quite different, but seem to flow, from one to the next. These are:-

- Jesus is the way to God
- Coming to accept Jesus is good for our lives now and forever
- Those who accept Jesus are called to show God's love to others

### Jesus is the Way to God

The first disciples of Jesus, though devastated and confused when he died, very quickly changed after those first events of Easter and Pentecost. In our reading from the book of Acts today we hear Peter declare these words to the religious leaders, when being questioned by them:-

<sup>12</sup> There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

For them Jesus was the only way to know God. In John's gospel, chapter 14 verse 6 and 7 Jesus himself says these words:-

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

There is no way of getting around that these are big claims. The Jews did not believe in a number of different gods like many of the nations around them. They were strangely monotheistic. That is to say, they believed that there was

only one God, and that one God was the creator of everything, and held ultimate power over everything, both now and into the future.

This was a very different way of thinking to many ancient cultures. In fact, whilst similarities can be found in some of the creation narratives, many ancient cultures looked to a variety of gods. If we consider ancient Greek and Roman mythology with the interactions between gods and humans we see how different the Jews were. And yet, this is the religion from which Jesus emerged. The Jews were expecting that at some point in history, a Messiah would come, and in Jesus, his followers believed, the Messiah had come.

This transformation of those first followers of Jesus, after the Resurrection and Pentecost lead to Christianity not only separating from it's Jewish roots, but growing and spreading all around this planet on which we live.

Jesus made big claims about himself, his disciples believed them, and shared them with others.

Central to the Christian Faith is that we as human beings, fallen and imperfect as we are, can be forgiven and reconciled with God, by accepting what Jesus has done for us in his life, death and resurrection.

It is up to us to decide if we accept these claims today, that Jesus is the way to God.

### Coming to accept Jesus is good for our lives now and forever

For many in our modern pluralistic society, accepting that one figure in all of human history is the way to God, seems too much. And yet it is this Christian faith which has provided comfort and solace to so many down the ages.

Today in the bible reading from John's Gospel in Chapter 10 we hear the imagery of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd who cares for the sheep. We also heard probably the most well known of all the psalms, Psalm 23, which begins with those well known words, "The Lord is my shepherd".

A shepherd caring for sheep may not be such a great an image for the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban society in which most of us here at St Cuthbert's live today, but for the agrarian society in which Jesus lived 2000 years ago it was a very powerful image. Although we may not have the same familiarity with sheep that those first followers of Jesus did, we can still understand the imagery.

Knowing Jesus today, will not stop us from facing difficulties and challenges in life, but it will give us comfort, knowing that we are secure in God's love. In John 10:14 today we hear Jesus say:-

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”

Accepting Jesus, allows us to know God’s peace in our lives. Not a peace based on wishy washy feel good psychology, but on the God who created the universe, in which we exist, and a God who is made known to us in the person of Jesus.

As Christians we will face difficulties, we will face challenges, but the resurrection hope we have in Jesus is more than sufficient to sustain us. The first followers of Jesus believed their lives would be better for following Jesus, and they believed that through the resurrection of Jesus, that physical death was not the end, and that they too would not really die, but spend eternity with the resurrected Jesus.

I recall reading a New Scientist article, a number of years ago, of a scientific study that found people of religious faith statistically lived longer and happier lives than those of no faith.

So, accepting Jesus, not only gives us better lives here and now, but in the Resurrection, it also gives us hope for all eternity.

Those who accept Jesus are called to show God’s love to others

This hope that we have in Jesus, is a faith that calls us into action.

Just as we hear in the “Acts of the Apostles” how the lives of the first followers of Jesus were impacted by their faith, we too are called into Christian Action.

But how are we to act? In the reading from the first Letter to John today (1 John 3:23) we hear these words:-

“And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”

So first we believe and accept Jesus, and then we love one another.

Loving one another is such a big and broad task. Today, is ANZAC day and we recall the love for us demonstrated by those who have defended our country Australia, and the ideals of freedom and justice which we cherish.

On ANZAC Day, we are also drawn to these words of Jesus (John 15:13) :-

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

The ultimate thing we can do is to lay down our lives for one another, and on Anzac Day we remember those who have done that, for us.

We are called to love one another. This will look different for different people, and at different times and stages of our lives, but it is an imperative for us, as Christians, that we seek to love one another.

Loving one another is not easy. Jesus' earthly life was not necessarily easy either, but "Loving one another" is something that we need to continue to endeavor to do in our lives.

### Conclusion

Today we have looked at how accepting Jesus will allow us to know God's love and peace in our lives. I pray that as we continue to know and feel God's love for us, we will be encouraged to show that love, outwardly in our lives, not only in all that we say, but also in all that we do. Amen.