

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 28)
10-10-2021
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Job 23: 1-9, 16-17 Job Questions God's apparent distance from Him.
- Psalms 22: 1-15 The Lord carries us from suffering to Joy.
- Hebrews 4: 12-16 Nothing is hidden from Jesus
Because of Jesus we can approach God with confidence
- Mark 10:17-31 Jesus speaks to the rich young man.
First will be last and the last will be first.

Introduction

This morning in the sermon I'd like us to look at each of the readings we've heard, and I'd like us to look at what they might tell us about the relationship between ourselves and God.

Last week, the readings focused on family relationships, and how we interact with each other, in light of our Christian faith. This week I'd like to look at some aspects of the relationship that we as individuals, have with God.

- Firstly I'd like to look at how God can sometimes seem very distant.
- Then I'd like to look at how close God really is to us.
- And I'd like to conclude with what this means for us.

When God Seems Distant

Despite the wonderful hope that the Christian faith offers us, God can at times seem distant from us as we go through life's journey. The first two readings from scripture give us some examples of this.

In the first reading from the book of Job, we hear Job, crying out in anguish, "My complaint is bitter" he says to God. We know though, that the story of Job is one of endurance. Despite all his suffering, Job retains his faith in God, and Job is vindicated in the end.

In Psalm 22 today, we hear the words that Jesus repeated on Good Friday, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?". I'd believe we should see these words of the psalmist not as a cry of doubt, but rather as an urgent appeal to God for help.

An example I thought of closer to our times is of Mother Teresa. Early in her ministry she had wonderful visions, and revelations from God. She received

great inspiration from this, as she embarked on living her life as a follower of Jesus. Later she went through periods of what has been described as, “the dark night of the soul”. She could no longer feel God’s presence in a way she was previously able to, and yet she held to her faith and was enabled to persevere.

Now, just like Job, and the Psalmist, and even Mother Teresa, could at times, feel distant from God. That too can happen to us. But we should know, that even if we do feel like this, God is still there, for us and with us.

How close God really is to us

Even though we sometimes feel that God may be distant from us, Scripture is filled with assurances that God knows us, and loves us and will always remain by our side, as long as we seek God.

The writer to the Hebrews today, reminds us that if we hold fast to Jesus, we will always have access to God. This is what we hear in Hebrews 4:16 –

“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

And even though in Psalm 22 today we hear of crying out to God in the most difficult of times, in the next, Psalm 23, we are reminded of God’s care, concern, and closeness to us. In Psalm 23:4 we hear :-

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.”

The Aussie Bible uses some more emotive language and puts it like this :-

“God is close beside me, so close I can feel his breath.”

And probably the most quoted verse of John’s Gospel puts it like this :-

“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

We may, at times, face great challenges and difficulties, we may, at times, even feel that God is very far from us, but we can be assured that in Jesus God loves us, and in Jesus, God is always there with us, and waiting for us.

How much God knows us

And not only is God close to us, but God knows us intimately.

In chapter ten of Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus telling his disciples not to fear those who can only destroy the body, and he goes on to say that even the hairs of your head are all counted. Who counts the hairs on your head? That is how much God knows us.

And again in our reading from Hebrews today we hear:-

“And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.” Hebrews 4:13

In the reading from Mark's Gospel today we heard the story of Jesus and the Wealthy Young Man. We hear how Jesus talked with him and really understood him. Jesus knew he had sort to live a moral life, but Jesus also saw his weakness in his love for money over God.

I recall an interesting story from the Alpha Course. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries, loved practical jokes. As a joke, he once sent a telegram to each of 12 friends. All were men of great virtue and respected in society. The telegram simply read, “Flee! All has been discovered.” To his shock, within 24 hours, the story goes, all 12 had left the country! This story may be exaggerated but it reminds us that there may be things we want to hide from others, not matter how virtuous we may think we are.

The thing is, God knows all about us, we can't hide anything from God. And when we really think about it, it's a little scary, just as it probably was for those first disciples of Jesus. In the Gospel reading today, we hear them ask Jesus after the wealthy young man walks away – “Then who can be saved”. But Jesus reassures them – “With God all things are possible”.

If we continue as followers of Jesus, then we too have the hope of salvation. God sent Jesus so that we might personally know God, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us along life's journey.

Comparison of Job and Wealthy Young Man

God knows us intimately, and wants us to know Him, the question is do we want to know God?

In the story of Jesus and the Wealthy Young Man, we hear of a person who wasn't particularly bad, he had sort to live a good life, but couldn't put his trust

in God. This must have been difficult for the disciples of Jesus to get their heads around, as the Jews would have seen material blessings as proof of God's favour. God had blessed him so much materially, that he was trapped in the material world and could only trust that. Here in Australia, it can be very much like that for us. Many people today are so concerned about the material that they are lost to God.

Let us contrast this with the story of Job. Job was suffering, Job had lost all of his material possessions, but despite all that was happening to him, Job continued to trust God.

Often people confuse Christianity with a type of Morality. As Christians we should be seeking to live virtuous lives, but it should be, as a result of the relationship we have with God through Jesus. Being good doesn't get us into heaven, but rather being good is evidence of our acceptance of Jesus, and that we are already taking our part in God's Kingdom.

Conclusion

Being a Christian is about being in a relationship with God. It isn't necessarily about feeling wonderful, all of the time. In fact, sometimes we're bound to feel downright miserable.

It also isn't about everything always going the way we want it to. But it is about knowing that through Jesus everything is going to be ok. In all that he did for us, in his life, in his death and in his resurrection, we know how much God loves us, and we know we have a sure hope for the future. We might not always feel that everything is ok, but we can always know that God knows how we feel, and that he loves us no matter what.

If we turn to Jesus, we have the assurance that he knows and loves us. It's up to us to continue to turn to God and to put, all of our faith, and all of our hope, and all of our trust in God.

And as we do this, we can be assured of, "the Peace of God, which passes all understanding". Amen.