

The Second Sunday of Advent
05-12-2021
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Malachi 3: 1-14 God's messenger is coming – don't rob God.

Psalm – Song of Zechariah God has sent a Saviour to forgive our sins.

Philippians 1:1-11 Paul's prayer for the Philippians that they will be ready when Jesus returns

Luke 3: 1-6 John the Baptist comes proclaiming a baptism of repentance and preparing the way for Jesus.

Introduction

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. The Advent season is a time set aside in our church calendar to prepare, both for the celebration of Christmas, and also, for when Jesus will come again.

The theme for today is Peace. As I was preparing and going through the Bible readings set down for today, I noticed that there is also the theme of Repentance. It is actually through repentance, that we can come to peace, so I would like to look at both Repentance and Peace this morning.

Repentance

The theme of repentance is central to Christian Faith.

In the Gospel reading today we hear of John the Baptist:-

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins

The first words of Jesus recorded in Mark's Gospel are:-

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

When we repent, we receive forgiveness and can be sure we are in a right relationship with God. And it is this relationship which will give us peace.

So let's look at repentance in a little more detail.

The word, “repentance” seems to have quite negative connotations around it.

I have been watching a documentary recently about groups of British celebrities going on pilgrimages together. They come from all walks of life and very few of them are actually Christian. It’s like a strange reality show, where they are doing this rather Christian thing, but each seeking their own meaning and purpose from it.

I recall one conversation where one of the pilgrims said, “I don’t believe in God, especially one you have to repent to. If you’ve done something bad, you can’t undo it, so you just have to get on with your life.” Someone then said to him, “But wouldn’t you say sorry to a person if you did something wrong to them and you knew it was wrong and it hurt them.” “Oh, of course”, he replied, “I say sorry to people all the time.”

It’s interesting that the guy, understood saying sorry to other people. It’s hard to know his reason for not wanting to then say sorry to God, but I assume it would be as simple as, that if you don’t believe in God why would you need to say sorry to God.

Christians do believe that God exists. In fact, Christians don’t just believe that there is a God out there somewhere, but we believe that God is the creator of everything, and God as the creator, wants the creation to be in harmony with God.

As human beings we are created to live in a relationship with our creator. Because we are human beings though, we do things that may not be in line with God’s will, and so we have a deep need to repent.

Whilst repentance may involve saying sorry to God or to another person, it is much deeper than that. One of the Greek words for repentance in the New Testament is metanoia. “Metanoia” actually means not just to be sorry, but also to turn your life around. It’s about doing a 180 degree turn around. It is more about changing the orientation or attitude to how you live your life.

Repentance actually involves reorientating our lives from being focused on ourselves and what we want, to being focused on God and what God wants.

And, it is through repentance that we know our relationship with God is restored.

As we read in the bible, we can be assured that repentance works, not because it is something we do, but because it is accepting what God has already done for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

So rather than having a negative connotation for Christians, repentance should have a very positive connotation.

As Christians we believe in a God of Mercy, but we also believe in a God of Justice. In God's justice, Jesus took the punishment for all that we need to repent of, on the cross.

On the cross Jesus dealt with what cuts us off from a relationship with God, by dying in our place. Repentance is an acknowledgement of this.

I think most people try to live good lives. But that is not really the yardstick. It's not that we don't try to live good lives, but that we often fall short of what may be best. We are all fallible human beings. If we are honest with ourselves, we all make mistakes, we all hurt others at times even if unintentionally. We do things our way and not God's way. And so, we all need forgiveness, and the way to receive forgiveness is through repentance.

If I have a disagreement with Leeza (my wife) and it's my fault, then she may let it slide overtime, but our relationship will be impaired. But if I apologize and say sorry, and mean it, then the relationship has a much better chance of getting back on track. Our relationship with others is different to our relationship with God, but I'm sure you can see the benefit of repentance in this example.

If we don't need to repent, then we don't need Jesus as our Saviour. But if we do need to repent, and I see very good evidence of that in daily life on earth, then repentance and knowing Jesus as our Saviour is the best news in the world.

Peace

And now let's look at how repentance brings peace.

"If we truly repent, then we can be assured of God's forgiveness."

I believe this is the only way to truly receive peace.

Whilst there is no scientific way to prove this statement, it has given comfort and peace to Christians down the ages. It has allowed them to do many wonderful things in the world. It has altered the course of history in many ways for the good of humanity.

Knowing we are forgiven and in a right relationship with the God who created us, truly does give great peace.

One of the blessings we use in worship puts it like this:-

“The peace of God which passes all understanding.”

In a recent article by Rev. Greg March, in the “North Coast Anglican”, he says that when he decided to do what he thought would make God happy, rather than what he was currently doing in his life, he felt a peace come upon him, a peace that hit him like a ton of bricks. That sounds like the sort of peace that is good to have.

God’s peace, does not mean that all our worldly problems will go away. In fact, if we look at the biblical examples of the first followers of Jesus then we can see that they faced great challenges. But we also see that they were given God’s peace to deal with everything that came their way.

God’s peace is something that is real, and God’s peace is something we can know, and feel, as we live our lives, if we repent and turn to God in faith.

Conclusion

The words repentance and peace may not seem at first glance related. The word “repentance” involves acknowledgment that we are not perfect and cause offence to God and others, whereas the word “peace” is calming and soothing just to hear.

But true repentance will give us peace, and peace is precious.

The peace of God is a gift from God that no one can take away from us.

I pray that as you continue to repent, you will know and feel God’s peace.

And this peace will enable you to be ready when Jesus returns.

Amen.