

The Fourth Sunday in Lent
27-03-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Joshua 5:2-12 Israelites circumcised prior to reentry to the Promised land

Psalms 32 Forgiveness brings true joy

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation
Jesus brings reconciliation

Luke 15: 11-32 The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Introduction

Today is the Fourth Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season in our church calendar when we set aside time to intentionally turn back to God, as we prepare for the celebration of Easter.

I would like to look at the three main characters in our Gospel reading today. And I would like to look at what they might have to teach us about Repentance, Forgiveness and Gratitude. Because I believe Repentance, Forgiveness and Gratitude, are at the heart of the right response we should make, to God's all embracing love for us.

God's All Embracing Love – The Father

Firstly, let's look at the love shown by the father. It would have been hard for the people of Jesus day to understand, the outpouring of love that was shown by the Father to the prodigal son. The love, care and concern, goes beyond anything that would have been considered reasonable.

In this story of the Father and the young son, we hear Jesus trying to help us to understand the love that God has for each and every one of us. In this parable we know that God loves us. And in the life death and resurrection of Jesus we see how much he loves us. From the cross Jesus looks down to each and every one of us and says - I love you.

Repentance - Prodigal Son

And now let's look at the Prodigal Son. The one who went bad. The one who lost the plot and blew his inheritance before he was even due to really receive it.

There is no question that he really mucked up. We see how he eventually came to this realization, and went to seek forgiveness. The Jews who heard

this story would have been very shocked, but Jesus had a habit of doing this with the stories he told.

Here we have a young man who asks for his inheritance while his father is still alive, and quite healthy too, it would seem. This, in itself, would have been considered very poor form. I'm not quite sure why the father would have agreed to his request. It doesn't seem to fit with the Jewish tradition, especially as he wasn't the oldest son. For reasons unknown to us the father gives him the money. But it doesn't end there. He then goes and blows all the money. He wastes it on quite dubious things. And to top it all off he ends up feeding pigs. The Jews listening to this story would have been absolutely horrified. According to the law of Moses pigs were unclean animals, they couldn't be eaten or used for sacrifices, so a good Jew wouldn't have even touched pigs. This young son had reached the bottom there wasn't really any lower for him to go. At this point he must have been utterly lost to his father. He reasons with himself and decides to repent, he doesn't after-all have anything to lose.

To his surprise the father runs out to greet him, and ends up throwing a party. This too would have shocked the Jews listening to Jesus. The father was the head of the house in their culture. He wouldn't be running out to see anyone, much less a disinherited son.

We in our own way are all broken, we may not have done the things that the prodigal son did, yet we all fall short at times in our lives. There are times when we rebel against God. There are times when we want the things we want, and times when we harbour bitterness and resentment. There are times when we have left undone the things we ought to have done.

We see repentance in the Prodigal Son, and we are challenged as to where we may need to repent in our lives.

Gratitude and Forgiveness - Older Brother

Let's now look at the older brother. He didn't go out and waste his inheritance. He stayed at home and worked hard for his father. As the story goes, he did everything "Right". And yet due to his unwillingness to forgive, due to his bitterness about the injustice of it all, he was cutting himself off from the father's love, just as the younger son had done.

I believe Jesus had aimed this part of the story directly at the Pharisees. They thought they were above the common person. They were rigorous in keeping the law. They had done so much for God.

It is easy for us to fall into the trap of resenting God for forgiving people we might consider far worse sinners than our selves. If we do this, then we are no better than the Pharisees.

The older brother brings us to the second part of the words we say in the Lord's Prayer:-

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

If there is unforgiveness in our hearts, then how can we seek forgiveness. The truth is that seeking forgiveness and forgiving others goes hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. Not forgiving someone will rarely effect them, they may not even know or care, but if you can forgive someone else, you release yourself of such a burden.

The older brother teaches us that we too need to forgive, if we are to be forgiven.

And with the older brother we are also challenged as to who we put our trust in. He trusted in Himself only. We need to trust in God.

We are challenged by both brothers today as to how we respond to God's Love for us. We need to trust God and show gratitude to God in our lives.

Conclusion

Repentance, forgiveness and gratitude are responses we make to God. In responding to God, I'm reminded of a famous Christian Painting. You may have seen copies of it. I recall a stained glass window of it in St James Cathedral in Townsville. It's based on Revelation 3:20

"Listen, I am standing at the door knocking; If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you."

The painting has a door covered in vines and Jesus standing outside the door with a lantern and knocking. When the artist was being questioned about the painting someone commented that he had forgotten to put a handle on the door. The artist assured the enquirer that he hadn't forgotten it at all. The handle is on the inside.

Jesus does not force his way in on any of us. He stands and knocks.

It's up to us to grab the handle and open the door to God's love and forgiveness.

And after we've done that it's up to us to show that forgiveness and gratitude, to those around us, to those whom we know, so Jesus will also be made know to them, in us.