

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
08-05-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 9: 36-43 Tabitha dies and is brought back to life

Psalms 23 The Lord is my Shepherd

Revelation 7: 9-17 The Lamb will be their Shepherd

John 10: 22-30 Jesus questioned about the Messiah
He says he is the Shepherd and his Sheep know him.

Introduction

Today is the 4th Sunday of Easter, it is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

We hear about Jesus as the Good Shepherd, who cares for us, his sheep. Today, as we think about Jesus the Good Shepherd, I'd like to focus on a verse from our Gospel Reading:-

²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

Last Taboo

Today I like to talk about what I think is a taboo in our Society. It's not Politics, or Sex, those topics seem to be everywhere. Today I would like to talk about death.

Why we don't talk about Death

Death is a very clear reality that we will all face, (unless Jesus returns before it happens) and yet it appears to me, to be a fact of life, that most people have not really prepared for.

If we believe Jesus is the Good Shepherd, if we believe in the verse from John 10:28, then why shouldn't we be prepared for it?

I believe a lot of the problem is fear. Death is something we fear, so if we ignore it, if we stick our heads in the sand then we don't have to deal with it.

There is currently an add on the television for funeral insurance, and when his friends start to talk about it, the turtle goes into his shell and won't come out.

I think if we ignore it though, this just makes it a lot harder to deal with when it does actually come.

But I also believe there's an element of us wanting to be in Control. It's to do with our sinful nature. We want to call the shots in our life, and we don't want to hand the control over to God.

Not wanting to Die

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not at all saying that we should want to die. It is of course part of our Human nature to fight for life. The formalization of hospices, which became hospitals, came about as part of the mission of the Christian Church. As Christians we believe God has given us life and this is precious, but what I would like to look at today is:-

“are we prepared for death when the time comes.”

Let's continue by looking at some words of St. Paul from his letter to the Philippians (1:20-26):

²⁰It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Here we see that St Paul is quite clearly not afraid of Death. In fact he is in two minds. He is convinced of his faith in Jesus and knows to die is to be with Him, but he also knows that God has plans for his life.

Being Convinced of our Faith

I suppose the question for us is:-

“Are we convicted of our faith in Jesus?”

It seems to me, that being a Christian is a bit like being pregnant, you either are or you're not. There isn't really an in between.

You may be a new Christian, that is, maybe only a couple of months pregnant, or you may have been a Christian for a long time, that is, maybe 8 months pregnant, but you either are or you aren't.

To take this analogy a little further, being pregnant continues until the baby is born.

So being a Christian continues in this life, until we are born to eternal life.

If we have become a Christian, then our life is not our own. We have handed control over to Jesus.

To be a Christian, is to acknowledge our sinfulness and to accept all that Jesus has done for us, in his Life to teach us how to live, in his Death to assure us of salvation and in his Resurrection to give us hope. There is no work we can do to be assured of God's love and forgiveness. Jesus has done it for us on the cross.

We just have to accept it, and hand over the Lordship, the control, of our lives to Jesus. Now obviously we still have to make decisions, but these decisions are based on what it is to follow Jesus. And this brings us back to the Gospel reading today. Jesus talks about those who are his followers, Jesus says:-

²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

If we have accepted Jesus then we are secure in his hands, no one can take us from Him.

If we have accepted Jesus, we don't need to fear.

If we have accepted Jesus, then we know he will be with us, and we will be with him, forever.

Example

I'd like to share with you an example that David Broughton, a Priest who taught when I did a Diploma of Anglican Orders, shared with us.

It was of an influential Christian man who had lived a long life. He had continued with meetings and appointments well into his old age. He was so old that he needed a carer to look after him in his own home. One night he sat looking in his diary, and realized he no appointments or meetings into the future.

His diary was free.

He said to his carer that night, " I'm ready to go now."
That night he died in his sleep.

Conclusion

God might have a lot more work for you to do - that's great.

You have a lot of future appointments and meetings in Your diary – that's great also.

But I want you to know that as Christians, we don't have to fear death.

As followers of Jesus, God has assured us we are secure in His hands. As human beings, we may be apprehensive, we may wonder about what will happen to our loved ones and any number of questions, but as followers of Jesus we need to know that God holds everything in His hands, and we can trust Him.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and these are his words to us:-

²⁷My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

Amen.