

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
10-07-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Amos 7:7-17	The Lord sets a Plumbline Amos tells Amaziah of the judgement to come.
Psalms 82	Surely God will judge the evildoer, He will uphold the cause of the weak
Colossians 1: 1-14	Paul gives thanks for the Colossians, and prays they will continue to grow in the Spirit
Luke 10: 25-37	Jesus tells the Two Great Commandments And the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Introduction

As I was reflecting on the scriptures we have listened to this morning, it seemed to me that the focus was on how we are to behave as followers of Jesus. In the reading from the Prophet Amos, we have the image of the plumbline, as a guide to how we conduct our lives, and in Luke's Gospel we have the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Today I would like to look at the question the Lawyer asks Jesus,

“what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Because, just as it was then, the answer is the same for us today. Jesus coaxes the answer out of the lawyer, who knows it before he even asks Jesus.

And the answer is of course the Two Great Commandments

- Love God
- Love your neighbour as yourself

We often hear the second, and I think it has been absorbed into our culture as the “Golden Rule”, that is, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. It is something that ethicists and humanists, are usually comfortable with. It's something that seems to be generally accepted. But the first one I believe is less well understood.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.

I think it's pretty clear from this that we are to first love God, not just a bit, but completely and wholeheartedly. But what might this look like in our lives?

So, let's explore these two commandments, and at how we are called to live our lives, if we are to, “inherit eternal life”.

Commandment 1 – Love God

We begin with the first commandment.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.

But Why love God?

The Christian faith holds that God is the Creator. Everything we see physically came into being by God creating it. As human beings we are created by God, and for God. Sometimes I think we try to domesticate God. We try to limit God to be more human like us, so we can relate to God, but I think we need to recognize that the God we read about in the Bible, is bigger than we can even begin to imagine.

And we also know from the Bible that, “God loves us”. God created us and God has as a plan for the World, and for each and every one of us. The Biblical World View begins with Creation, and finds it’s fulfillment in the New Creation.

But whilst God is, in one sense, beyond our comprehension, God also wants us to know that God loves us. So, in the fullness of time, God sent Jesus, as a human being, just like us, so that we could know the way to God.

If we accept Jesus and seek to follow Jesus we can be assured of God’s love and forgiveness, however if we reject Jesus, we cut ourselves off from God.

God loves us all as part of His creation. But God doesn’t force us to love Him back. God sent Jesus, and because of what Jesus has done for us, we can live secure in the knowledge of this Love. Loving God leads to us, “inheriting eternal life”.

That’s the why we should love God, let’s now look at the,

How do we love God?

Loving God starts with accepting what Jesus has done for us, and then seeking to follow Jesus in our lives.

I think examples help so, let’s look at what should be the most important of our human relationships, the how do we love our husband or our wife?

If we love our wife or husband, we should want to spend time with them, we should want to communicate well with them, and we should want to care for them. It’s not easy and it will take a lot of time and effort on our part to do it well, but it will also be the most rewarding thing we can experience, in human terms, if we both do it well together.

Our relationship with God is of course different, but it is also similar. If we love God, we should want to spend time with God, we should want to communicate well with God, and we should want to care for God.

We can spend time with God, in many and varied ways.

One of the ways we spend time with God is through worship. Worship is the act of praising God. Gathering together and worshipping God, is fundamental to being part of a Christian Faith Community. Obviously, this has been hard over the last couple of years with Covid, and because of circumstances many people find it hard to physically gather, but there are many options to help us to worship God, whatever our circumstances.

We can communicate well with God, in many and varied ways.

One way we communicate well with God is through prayer. Some advice I heard recently on prayer, was to keep it simple, to keep it real, and to keep it going. Prayer is something that may come easily at times, but it may also be something we struggle with. To be diligent in prayer will require great effort on our part, however the rewards are definitely worth the effort. I have found that even if the time is short, sticking to it makes a big difference. And another pointer is that prayer not only involves talking to God, but also listening to what God might have to say to us. Another way we communicate well with God is by being immersed in the Scriptures. The better we know the bible, the better we can know, understand, and relate to God.

We can care for God, in many and varied ways. Primarily though it is by caring for others, and we will look at that in Commandment 2. In Matthew 25:40 when Jesus is teaching about the final judgement he uses these words:-

⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

We love God, by committing to God of what is important to us.

Commandment 2 – Love your Neighbour

Let us now look at the Second Commandment.

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Jesus has given us the wonderful parable of the Good Samaritan to help us to understand what it means to love our neighbour as ourself. Let's look at the three examples of how to treat people:-

Firstly, the robbers. They took from the traveler and inflicted harm upon him. This is clearly not showing love and we can understand it.

Secondly, the Priest and the Levite. They didn't inflict any harm on the traveler, but they were indifferent to his needs. They kept to themselves and failed to help the traveler.

And thirdly the Samaritan. The Samaritan gave of himself to help meet the needs of the traveler. The Samaritan gave the example of what is required of us if we are to love our neighbour as ourselves.

In his little book "The Cost of Compassion", Tim Costello says that if you ask most people, they are all in favour of compassion. It doesn't matter if you are from the left or the right, religious or not, people think compassion is good. And we have Christianity to thank for that.

But when it comes down to it, if we look around the world, we still see a great lack of compassion. At a local level we see disagreement in families and the community. In the bigger picture there are constantly wars around the world.

If we are going to be like the Good Samaritan, we need to work at it and we need God's help. The incredible thing is though, if we are genuinely able to show compassion for others it changes us for the better and it enriches our lives.

Conclusion

Today we hear Jesus affirm the Two Great Commandments as the way to "inherit eternal life".

We are called to Love God, and to Love one another.

I believe that unless we begin to understand and carry out the first, I don't think we'll be able to adequately live out the second.

Living out the Two Great Commandments makes for a challenging life, but it is where we will find our ultimate fulfilment.

Amen.