

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
28-08-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Jeremiah 2: 4-13 Jeremiah prophesies – the people have turned from God and followed other Gods. There are consequences for this.

Psalms 81:1, 10-16 God laments how he longs to give good to his people, yet they turn away.

Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16 Because of Jesus – do Good.
Instructions for a Godly life.

Luke 14: 1 (2-6) 7-14 Jesus teaches about Humility and Hospitality.

Introduction

Today, let us explore two themes from our bible readings, Repentance and Humility.

Repentance

Firstly, let's look at Repentance. What does it mean? To be sorry? Well, it sort of does, but it also means much more. The original Greek word "metanoia" which is used and often translated into "repentance" is more than just to be sorry. It envisages turning your whole life around. So, to repent really means to turn the focus of your life from yourself and on to Jesus.

The first words of Jesus in Mark's gospel are:

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

Why Repent?

Today's reading from Jeremiah talks about God's chosen people, and how they turned away from God. This is the story of God's chosen people throughout the Old Testament. This is the story of humanity which began with Adam and Eve. Humans have continued to turn away from God throughout history. It's in our human nature to want to do things our way and not God's way.

The reason we need to repent, is so that we can be forgiven for doing things our way and not God's way, and as we are forgiven, we can be reconciled to God. Because living in reconciliation with the God who created us, is the way we are designed to find true fulfilment in life.

Challenges to Repentance

I think we face two very different challenges when it comes to truly repenting before God. One is that we think what we've done can't be forgiven and another is that we don't think we have anything to be forgiven for.

Firstly, I recall speaking with a lady who thought that God wouldn't forgive her because of the things she had done in her life. I couldn't convince her that God would forgive her. I think she fell into the trap of thinking she was in control. She thought no one else could shape her destiny except her. She was unwilling to hand everything over to God. She didn't want to accept that God actually had the power to make a difference in her life. To me it was quite ironic, that whilst she desperately wanted forgiveness, she didn't want to trust God for it. The challenge for her was that she only trusted her own ability to do things, and was unable to trust God.

Secondly, and on the opposite end of the scale, is the challenge that we don't think we need forgiveness. I think more generally we try to kid ourselves that we are not sinners. We think we're alright, we're not in jail, but the reality is we all have done, and will do things, that cut us off from God. Why else would it be in our liturgy, with the opportunity to confess our sins, and to hear the reassurance that God forgives us, every time we come to worship.

I recall in a previous parish, talking to a long time parishioner and a stalwart of the church, who said to me after a Bible Study, "I think you've convinced me that I'm a sinner."

Repentance is central to becoming a Christian. In the Baptismal promises, the promises we make on accepting Christianity, we are asked the following four questions:-

Do you turn to Christ?

Do you repent of your sins?

Do you reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust?

Do you reject Satan and all Evil?

Unless we acknowledge that we need to repent, and what we need to repent of, we can never really experience, God's love. God's total forgiveness.

We hear in Psalm 81 today, how God wants to feed his people, with the finest wheat, but their refusal to repent kept them from receiving.

So, repentance is something that is totally necessary for each and every one of us. And if we truly repent, we receive forgiveness. No if's no but's.

That's why Jesus died on the cross for us. If we repent, we experience God's love for us in what Jesus has done for us. Our relationship with God is restored. If we fail to repent, we fail to receive forgiveness.

It's all good and well, to say that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We might even say we understand the concept of this. But unless we are sincere in repenting, we may not grasp it's meaning. It's one thing to say we know it in our minds, but it's another thing to say we have a living experience of God's love and forgiveness in our lives.

Repentance is central to the Christian way of life, it is key to knowing that we are forgiven, and it is key if we are to have the assurance of Salvation in Jesus. True repentance is not just a matter of what we think we believe. True repentance is what is in our hearts, and true repentance is a part of how we see ourselves in the world, under God. We need to be continually turning our lives around to face Jesus and not the world.

The Confession and Absolution is a very important part of our Anglican liturgy. Do we take the time to use this part of our worship service properly? I recall a Bishop saying that what we are going to confess before God is one of the things we need to have prepared, before we come to Worship.

So, repentance is central to our Christian faith. We need to acknowledge our sins before God, and we have the wonderful assurance that God forgives.

Humility

One of the evidences that we are living lives of repentance, is if our lives marked by humility.

Humility is very different to humiliation. Humility is not about having no power but about giving up your power.

In the story today, the guy going to the wedding had a choice about where he chose to sit. It's not that he was forced to sit at the back, but that he might freely chose it.

Because of Jesus, Humility is a respected and admired part of our western culture. Even if it is often not practiced so much, it is still admired.

In parts of the world where Christianity has not been formative in the society. Shame and Honour are often the ways people see themselves in the world, and the way they have relationships with others. It is a very different way of looking at the world.

In living lives of humility, we are called not to put ourselves first, but to serve others. It may be a challenging and difficult way to live our lives, but it will give us satisfaction in our lives, far beyond what we might expect if we are greedy or self centred.

Conclusion

Jesus calls us to Repentance, and Jesus calls us to live lives of Humility. We may not see this as desirable, we may even think it's a bit hard to do, but in repentance and humility, we find the way to live in relationship with the God who created us, and to live in repentance and humility is to live in the way God intended. And God wants the best for us.

If we live in repentance and humility, we will know the love, forgiveness, and peace of God. Amen.