

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
25-09-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15	Jeremiah buys a field
Psalms 91: 1-6, 14-16	The Lord our protector
1 Timothy 6:6-19	Money can lead you away from Faith Remain faithful and diligently follow God
Luke 16: 19-31	The Rich Man and the Beggar

Introduction

As I was reflecting on our scripture readings for today, the theme of listening and responding to God seemed to resonate through them.

And, as I thought about this theme of listening and responding, I was drawn to the image of an alarm clock with a snooze button. Alarm clocks have a purpose, to wake us up, but snooze buttons are there to thwart what the alarm clock is trying to do. The purpose of the alarm clock is to wake us up so we can get up. The purpose of the snooze button is to avoid getting up. I know this analogy might seem a bit harsh, but to me the alarm clock is about listening to what God is saying to us, and hitting the snooze button is about choosing not to respond.

Being a Christian involves our whole being. If we have responded to God's Love, Grace and Mercy by accepting what Jesus has done for us, then we are called to live into that wonderful relationship with God. It means we are called to live our lives in tune with God. We are called to listen to God and respond.

To go back to the analogy, when the alarm goes off, we need to respond by getting up and not continually hitting the snooze button.

As we think about today's readings I want us to think about these two questions:-

Am I listening to God, and am I responding to God?

Jeremiah

Our first reading today from the Old Testament, is about Jeremiah listening for God's guidance and acting on it. It shows Jeremiah really putting his trust in God. In fact, if you look at the situation it doesn't seem like Jeremiah is

making a very astute decision. He is under house arrest in a city under siege. He is purchasing land currently occupied by enemy troops. I wonder how many of you might think that property investment in a war zone is a good idea? But Jeremiah trusted in God and had faith in God's promises to bring back his people and to rebuild Jerusalem. Jeremiah was acting through faith because he was in tune with God – Jeremiah was really listening to God, and acted accordingly.

Timothy

In our reading today from Paul's first letter to Timothy, we hear the older leader giving the younger leader some very sound advice. Paul tells Timothy not to listen to the ways of the world and get caught up with the love of money. He uses quite strong language. He tells him to shun it. And then he gives him six virtues to focus on:-

The virtues of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. If we focus on virtues like these, then we will be hearing God, and thus better enabled to live lives of faith in Jesus.

Luke

The story of the rich man and the beggar is one of lost opportunity. The rich man had worldly riches. He had the means to have been able to assist the poor man Lazarus, but he chose not to. The rich man wasn't living in faith, he wasn't listening to God. He hadn't prepared his life according to what God might expect.

It seemed he was a successful man. He was no doubt respected and well thought of in his community, but he failed to listen to God. This parable would have been a bit shocking for the Jews to hear. In their eyes financial blessings were a sign of God's blessings.

In this parable that Jesus tells, it's very interesting how the rich man gets to talk from beyond the grave. He asks for God to let Lazarus to wet his tongue, and he asks God to let Lazarus return from the dead to at least warn his brothers. In both instances God says a very clear NO. God loves us, God wants us to listen to Him and follow Jesus in our lives, but he doesn't force us.

In this parable though he is letting us know there are consequences for us if we fail to listen and respond. The time to listen to God is NOW, the time to act is NOW. If we fail to listen to God's call on our lives then the consequences are severe, far more severe than hitting the snooze button and missing a meeting.

If we shut off from listening to God, we risk being cut off from God forever.

Listening

So how do we listen to God?

How do we show others that we are listening to them? We listen firstly by giving to them of our time? To listen to someone else takes time.

The first thing we need to do to listen to God is to give to God of our time. How much time do you set aside each day, each week, to intentionally listen to God? We need to Give God time.

And once we've decided to give to God of our time, we need to work out how best to spend our time with God.

There are many ways we can do this, and generally we can't just pick one. We need to be reading the Bible and other Christian books so we can hear God. We need to spend time in prayer and worship so we can hear God. We may even need to do courses or regularly consult with a Spiritual Director so that we can hear and then discern how God is calling us.

Responding

And once we have heard God we need to respond.

We may not always have direct hear and respond aspects to our lives though. It won't necessarily be like, well I'll pray this morning and then I'll know what God wants me to do today. Hearing and responding will be interwoven into the pattern of our Christian lives. But if we are really listening to God, then we will be made aware of how God is calling us to respond. Maybe directly, but more usually indirectly as the way we live our lives will line up with what we have read in the bible, what we have heard in Church, or what has been modelled to us by other Christians

In the letter to Timothy today we hear how to respond to God:-

¹⁷ As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

In the gospel reading today we hear how the rich man failed to be generous.

If we are responding to God, is it evident in our lives?

What are our relationships with others like?

Do we share of what we have with others?

Are we living as if there is more to life than just this earthly life, or are we consumed with what we can get in the here and now.

If we are limited to an earthly perspective, we will be limited to self absorbed earthly lives, but if we have listened to God and sought to respond, our lives will be lifted to the more heavenly plane, with a more heavenly satisfaction.

Conclusion

To live a life of faith in Jesus, does not necessarily make for an easy life though. To follow Jesus is a challenge and at times it can be hard. But it is the way to life, as we are meant to live it, and the way of hope.

To go back to the originally analogy, when we hear the alarm clock, we are to ignore the snooze button, and we are to get up and live.

So, we are called as Christians to listen to God, and then in the listening we are called to respond, by living lives of faith, hope and generosity. Amen.