

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
02-10-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Lamentations 1: 1-6	Jeremiah mourns for Jerusalem
Psalms 137	Weeping over the bitterness of captivity
2 Timothy 1:1-14	Encouragement to be Faithful
Luke 17: 5-10	Jesus talks of faith as big as a Mustard seed Faith should enable us to do the things we need to do

Introduction

Today I would like to explore the theme of Faith in our Bible readings. And I would like to look at some aspects of the Christian Faith, that come out from the scriptures.

- God loves us
- Sometimes it might not seem like it
- We only need faith as big as a mustard seed

1. God Loves us

Let's begin by looking at the aspect which is at the very start of the Christian Faith. God Loves us.

Whilst this aspect of our faith is not explicit in today's readings it is constantly referred to in Paul's advice in the reading from 2 Timothy today.

The bible tells us that we are created by God, in the image of God. At the very beginning God created the world for us to live in and be fruitful. But we also hear that the first human beings turned away from God. As human beings today, we also turn away from God. It's part of our human nature.

But we are not left cut adrift from our creator. In God's timing, God sent Jesus into the world so that we might have a way to be restored to God. If we accept what Jesus has done for us in his life, death and resurrection, then we can be assured that God loves us, and that we are secure, in a relationship with our creator. This is how we are designed to exist.

2. Sometimes it doesn't seem like it

God loves us, but sometimes, because of the world we live in, and because of our fallen human nature, it may not seem like it. We hear about that in our first two readings today.

In today's first reading from the book of Lamentations, we hear Jeremiah mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem. Lamentations is a dirge, a funeral song, that Jeremiah wrote after the fall of Jerusalem.

The people of Jerusalem had turned away from God, and the consequence was that they were overrun by the Babylonians. It probably seemed to them that God had abandoned them, but it was in fact, the other way around. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had abandoned God, and they were suffering the consequences.

Today's psalm also talks about the Israelites who were taken into captivity in Babylon. The psalmist is feeling such injustice that he writes what scholars have come to describe as imprecatory verses, where an imprecation is a curse that invokes misfortune upon someone.

Psalm 137:9 - ⁹ Happy shall he be who takes your little ones: and dashes them against the stones.

Imprecatory verses communicate a deep yearning for justice, written from the point of view of those who had been mightily oppressed. It is important to note that these verses were not written out of vindictiveness or a need for personal vengeance. Instead, they are prayers that keep God's justice, sovereignty, and protection in mind. God's people had suffered much at the hands of those who opposed them, especially the Babylonians.

Whilst noting the context of these verses, it is important for us as Christians to remember that Jesus taught us to love our enemies and to pray for them.

Christians are not exempt from the challenges of this world in which we live. Bad things, to varying extents happen to all people. To me that is why the bible makes so much sense of the world.

When bad things happen though, it does not mean that God doesn't love us. In fact, we hear these words from Paul to Timothy today:-

¹¹ For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹² and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.

Paul knew that having faith did not grant him immunity from the challenges of life, but rather, his faith gave him the strength to get through the challenges that life presented him.

Sometimes we might face hard challenges in life. During these times we are called to continue to place all of our hope, all of our trust and all of our faith in God. And God will not disappoint us.

3. Mustard Seed Faith

So let us look to putting our faith in God and what Jesus tells us in the reading from Luke's gospel today.

When Jesus tells his disciples to forgive so radically, they cry out to Jesus:-

“Increase our faith!”

And Jesus replies:-

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

I don't think Jesus is trying to tell the disciples that they don't need to have great faith, because mustard seeds are pretty small. I think Jesus is trying to tell the disciples that they need to have the right kind of faith.

In Christian terms, having faith is about trusting God wholeheartedly with your life. So, it is not the size of our faith, per se, but rather if our faith is genuine.

And if our faith is genuine, we will be enabled to do what God has called us to do in life.

I also like the analogy of the Mustard Seed for our faith, because seeds are alive, and they grow. As Christians if we have faith like a Mustard Seed, then it should be a faith that is alive and growing. And if our faith is alive and growing, it should show and produce results in our lives.

Paul reminds Timothy of how to keep this faith alive today:-

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

If we place our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is there to work in us in ways we can't begin to imagine.

Let us also look at the second part of our Gospel reading today, where Jesus reminds us that putting our faith in him, and following him, and doing our Christian Duty is not something that we should be seeking praise for, but rather something we should be grateful for having the privilege of carrying out.

If we have decided to put our faith in God and follow Jesus, we are called to say:-

“We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!”

These words seem far removed from our contemporary society, which is so self obsessed, and self seeking. As individuals the society around us continually gives us the message to fight for what we want. We are conditioned to seek out our own pleasures and desires.

The strange thing is though, the more we focus on doing God's will in our lives, the more fulfilled our lives will be.

Conclusion

Today I want us all to be reassured that the Christian Faith, Faith in Jesus Christ, is not hard or difficult to get, but genuine faith will be something that we need to work on throughout our lives.

There will of course be challenges on our journey, and having a faith in Jesus will require great effort on our part.

The wonderful thing is, that if we hold fast to this faith, we can be assured that Jesus is there with us every step of the way.

And in this faith, we will find true meaning and purpose for our lives.

I pray today that we will hold onto our faith, in all that Jesus has done for us, and we will use it to do God's will. Amen.