

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
06-11-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Haggai 1:15b-2:9 Take courage God is with you

Psalm 145 Praise the Lord for all his works
 He is near to those who call on Him

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 The day of the Lord is coming
 Don't be alarmed, Stand firm in your faith

Luke 20: 27-40 The Sadducees question Jesus on the Resurrection

Introduction

The Christian Faith is often described as the “Good News”. But I believe we don't just have “Good News”, I believe we have the best news!

I would like to explore how this works its way out in our lives. What does this mean for our lives and how do we live into this Good News that is best for us?

It may seem like a strange place to look at this “Good News” from, but I would like to look at it from the perspective of what do we fear.

Fear

There are two verses in our bible readings this morning that directly mention the word fear. In the first reading from the Prophet Haggai 2:5 we hear:-

“My spirit abides among you; do not fear.”

And in Psalm 145:19 we hear the Psalmist say of God:-

“He will fulfil the desire of those that fear him”

Fear is mentioned so many times throughout the bible, and we usually hear it in two contexts. The first is that we are told to “Fear God” (as in the Psalm today), and the second is that those who trust God do not need to fear (as in today's reading from Haggai).

When I have spoken to people about this before, I've had responses like, “God is Love, I wouldn't think of fearing God”, and in one sense I agree with this sentiment, but I believe we need to fear the consequences of rejecting God, so in that sense, we need to fear God.

Again and again in the bible, we hear warnings to fear God, and I believe as soon as we understand that it is good and right to fear the consequences of rejecting God, then we will be enabled to know God's peace in our lives and be enabled to live lives that are not fearful, but hopeful.

It might seem strange, but the more we fear God, the more likely we are to be free from fear, and have a sense of peace, in our lives.

Death

Now we normally fear bad things happening to us. And people would usually say that the worst thing that could happen to us, is that we die.

The reality is though at some stage in our lives we will all die. In his book entitled – "Heaven", Randy Alcorn describes death as our terminal disease. I think death is one of the last taboos in our society. People usually try to avoid talking about it. I once conducted a funeral for a very elderly lady, her daughters were all in their seventies, and they were all devastated when she died. Now don't get me wrong, I believe it is good and normal to be sad when someone we love dies, but it was quite strange. It's more normal for people to really want to celebrate when someone has lived a good and long life, but if we don't fear God, then all sorts of other fears can be allowed into our lives.

It seems to me that Paul, the great letter writer from the New Testament understood fearing God, and I would like to quote from his letter to the Philippians, (1:21-24) :-

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.

From this we can see that Paul wasn't really fearing death. In fact, he was at peace with dying as it meant being with Jesus.

Resurrection

And it is clear to me that Paul was able to live, not fearing even death, because he had a full sense of the resurrection of Jesus, and what it meant for him.

The sentence of scripture set down for today comes from John's Gospel :-

'I am the resurrection and the life,' says the Lord. 'Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'

After these words of Jesus, he asks Martha, "Do you believe this?"

And Martha replies to Jesus,

'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Paul had this clear sense of the resurrection also, and this is how he explained it in his first letter to the Corinthians:-

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ¹⁵We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

(1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

From this we see that the Christian hope is set firmly on the resurrection, and it is the resurrection that enables us to live hope filled lives.

Heaven

But what will the resurrection be like?

I think there are so many warped idea's out there, that some people think that they wouldn't want to go to heaven. I can recall one episode of the cartoon "The Simpsons", which depicted heaven as up on the clouds, and God was an old man with grey hair and a beard and everyone was playing harps. I'm not sure quite where that image has come from, but it doesn't seem very biblical to me, and it doesn't seem like a place that I would want to go either.

The Sadducees in today's gospel reading were so small minded about the resurrection that they were looking at it from a very earthly perspective. They were worrying about trivialities, whereas Jesus made it clear to them that the resurrection would be on a much higher level, it was not about death but about living.

In the Book of Revelation, we hear that there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth, and every tear will be wiped away. We can't know exactly what the resurrection will be like, but we can be assured that it will be better than we can even begin to imagine. Heaven will be a place we will want to be. And hell, that is being eternally cut off from God, will be a place we will definitely want to avoid.

Implications for our life now

So, what are the implications for our life now.

If we fear the consequences of rejecting God, then the best thing we can do is to put all of our faith, and all of our hope, and all of our trust in Jesus.

When we wholeheartedly trust in the resurrection, then we will be enabled to live without fear, even the fear of death.

This is not to say that we won't face challenges, or things will not concern us, but we will be given God's presence and God's peace to assist us in all that we face.

When we trust God, we will be helped not to get tied up in the meaningless aspects of life, but be helped to stand firm, as Paul said in the reading to the Thessalonians today:-

¹⁴ For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

(2 Thessalonians 2:14-17)

Conclusion

Today we have talked about fear, and emphasized the centrality of the Resurrection, in enabling us to overcome fear.

It's through the death of Jesus, that we know we have forgiveness of our sins.

It's through the resurrection of Jesus that we have hope for the future.

And in this hope, we are freed from even the fear of death.

Let us live our lives, thoroughly grounded in this Hope. Amen.