

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
18-12-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

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| Isaiah 7: 10-16 | Immanuel – God with us |
| Psalms 80:1-7,17-19 | Restore us O God |
| Romans 1:1-7 | Paul set apart to Proclaim the Gospel – Jesus |
| Matthew 1:18-25 | Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled in the birth of Jesus |

Introduction

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, the last Sunday of Advent, we have almost come to the end of the season set aside in our Church Calendar to prepare for the Celebration of Christmas, the arrival of Jesus into the world as a Human Being like us, and for us.

Looking at our scripture readings set down for today, they seem to suggest the theme that God has a good plan for the world, and as such, God has a good plan for our lives. I would like to explore how God carries out these plans by looking at the following three aspects of God's good plans for our world:-

- Firstly, how God's plans are carried out through the Fulfillment of Prophecy.
- Secondly, God's plans are carried out by the People God chooses.
- And finally, how God's plans are carried out by the Church Today, that is both You and I.

Fulfillment of Prophecy

Let us first look at how God's good plans for our world are carried out through the Fulfillment of Prophecy.

Today we have a reading from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived and wrote about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. We hear in the reading today, that Isaiah was expecting Jesus to come. The Jews, who considered the writings of Isaiah to be God's Word, were thus also expecting Jesus to come.

Today we hear:-

¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

The birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophesy the Jews were expecting.

We hear today how the most Jewish Gospel, Matthew's Gospel, records it:-

²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' (Matthew 1:22-23)

And we hear Paul writing to the Romans, to let them know that he is proclaiming that , Jesus is the fulfillment of what the Jews have been expecting, – Paul says he is :-

set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures (Romans 1:1-2)

In the New Testament we also hear how Jesus promised that he would come again, that is why Advent is not only a time to prepare for the celebration of Christmas, but also a time to be mindful and acknowledge that Jesus will come again.

God brings about his good plans for our world by fulfilling what has been promised in the scriptures.

God uses People

And God also brings about his good plans for our world by using people.

All through the Bible we hear how God uses people, to carry out God's good plans for our world. In today's gospel reading we hear how Mary and Joseph, accepted the plans God put in place for them to be part of God's good plan for our world.

It is in Luke's Gospel where we hear Mary respond to the angel Gabriel:-

'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'

And today in Matthew's gospel we hear:-

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him

Mary and Joseph were open to hearing God's plans for their lives and being obedient to what God had planned for them, even when it didn't seem like these plans were what would normally be expected of them.

Mary became pregnant as a virgin. Joseph married a pregnant girl, when he knew he wasn't the baby's father.

Mary and Joseph were real people who responded to God's plans for their lives. They were parents to Jesus, a real person, and also the Son of God. Jesus was very much with us as a human being and at the centre of God's good plans for our world.

As we hear of the willingness of Mary and Joseph to be apart of God's plans for our world, we are challenged as to how well we listen to God in our lives.

It reminds me of the joke about the man stranded on his roof in the floods. His neighbour came by on his kayak and said, "Jump on the back, and I'll take you to safety", the man replied, "It's ok, I'm praying and trusting God, I'll be fine."

Then the SES came in a tinnie with an outboard motor and said, "We're here to rescue you, climb down off your roof and hop in the boat", the man replied, "It's ok, I'm praying and trusting God, I'll be fine."

Then a Rescue Helicopter came and lowered an emergency paramedic down to him. The paramedic encouraged the man to put on a harness so he could be winched to safety, the man replied, "It's ok, I'm praying and trusting God, I'll be fine."

Eventually the waters rose over the roof of the man's house, and he drowned. When he arrived in Heaven he said to God, "I was praying and trusting you to save me, I don't understand what happened".

God replied, "First I sent your neighbour, then I sent the SES, and finally I sent the Rescue Helicopter. I continued to answer your prayers, but you weren't open the answer."

Church today

Finally, God uses us, you and I, Christians in the world today, to bring about God's plans for our world.

As people with the ability to choose, we can choose to be in tune with God, so that we will be aware of, and be able to be a part of, God's good plans for our world.

What sort of things are we doing to be in tune with God?

Are we spending time, day by day with the bible?

Are we gathering with other Christians in prayer?

Are we listening for an answer when we pray to God?

What we do and pay attention to shapes how we live our lives. The more in tune we are with God, the more likely we will be living as God intended, and be truly fulfilled in our lives.

Conclusion

We know from the Bible that God has a Plan for this world in which we live. We know God is with us today because of what Jesus did.

We can experience God, and be enabled, through the Holy Spirit, to take our part in God's good plans for our world.

Mary and Joseph believed God would act in their lives, and they lived their lives accordingly.

Do we really believe and act as if God is with us, and within us? God has promised us this in Jesus. Let us live our lives as if we believe it.

Let us take up the call of Jesus to be part of God's Good Plan's for our world, as we live out our lives. Amen.