

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
05-02-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Isaiah 58: 1-9a The people fasted but neglected mercy

Psalms 112 Happy are those who fear the Lord and do his will

1 Corinthians 2: 1-13 God's wisdom is above human wisdom and comes from the Spirit

Matthew 5: 13-20 Be Salt and Light, Jesus fulfils the Law

Introduction

As we reflect on the scriptures we have heard read for us today, I would like to explore two aspects from these readings:-

Firstly, that as Christians, we are called to be Salt and Light to those around us.

And secondly, there will be challenges we will face, as we seek to live this way.

Called to be Salt and Light

Firstly, let us explore, how we are called to be Salt and Light to the world.

Our readings today have a very strong emphasis on the fact that we are not to give God mere lip service.

Being a Christian, is not just about an intellectual acknowledgement that God might exist, but rather, being a Christian, is about knowing God through the person of Jesus, submitting yourself to God and obeying God's will, and having a real and meaningful relationship with God.

In our first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah, we hear how the Israelites acknowledged God, and they even fasted, but it was clear they weren't fasting for the right reasons. In fact, a whole lot of other things they did, showed that they hadn't really taken God seriously. In the reading we hear how they were seeking their own interests and not God's interests, we hear how they oppressed their workers and how they quarreled and fought. We hear, that if they had been serious about following God, they would have shown mercy and sought justice. The prophet Isaiah was warning the Israelites to return to God, so they could know the wonderful peace of God.

In the reading from Matthew's Gospel today we hear Jesus teaching his disciples how they are to be Salt and Light.

Firstly, what does salt do? In Jesus time before refrigeration and the packaging that we have today, salt was a great preserver. And salt, like it is today, was also a great flavour enhancer.

If we are to be salt to the world, we are called to preserve and to enhance the Good News of Jesus for our world.

And secondly, what does light do? Light allows us to see. In Jesus' time light would have been at a much greater premium than today. We just have to flick a switch and we can have light at night. Where as, in Jesus time they would have to use expensive oil just to have the light of a small lamp.

Light is critical for us to live. Light symbolizes goodness, whereas darkness symbolizes evil and the bad in our lives.

When Jesus says we light a lamp not to hide it, but rather to put it in a prominent place so we can see by it's light, he then says:-

¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

If we are to be light to the world, we are to do the good works God has given us to do, so that others might be drawn to the Good News of Jesus in our world.

Jesus claimed to be the way to God, and people were drawn to his example, and sought to follow his example.

As disciples of Jesus today we are called to be the example in our time.

As Christians we are challenged as to how our lives are different to those around us who may not be Christians.

Do those around us see us as Salt and Light?

Challenges to being Salt and Light

There are of course many challenges to being salt and light in the world.

It cost Jesus his life.

This world is clearly not ideal, we only need to see how we have recently experienced, fires, and floods, and a pandemic, and wars overseas, to see what a broken world we live in.

Sometimes I've heard people say :-

"How can I believe in God when bad things happen."

It is a serious challenge, which I don't think we can or should take lightly, but we only need to look down the ages of history of those who have sought to follow Jesus and we can see a wonderful legacy of faith and hope.

Christians believe in a Creator God who is all powerful.

Christians believe that we can have access to God through Jesus.

And Christians believe that God has provided the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen all who follow Jesus today.

The only other options I can see are as follows:-

- There is No God, and we are left to each individually create our own meaning and purpose.
- God doesn't care, and so we are left to our own devices, or
- God is not in control, and evil may prevail

Reality is that in this life we don't know and can't explain why such events occur. But, I believe it is still intellectually ok to believe in a God who is in control.

In Psalm 112 today we hear of those who trust in God:-

"They will not fear bad tidings: their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord."

We can trust in a God who has made himself know to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And who continues to guide us through the Holy Spirit.

This is how some Theologians have explained this dilemma before:-

St Augustine of Hippo talked about how you:-

"Believe that you may understand"

And Anslem talked about "Faith seeking Understanding"

He looked at it this way. First he said you could say, "I Don't know God, so I can't believe in God", or you could say, "I Believe in God, so I can know God".

It's not until we first believe in God, that we can really come to know God.

It's not until we put all of our faith, all of our hope and all of our trust, in what Jesus has done for us, that we can begin to fully comprehend God's Love for us.

And once we experience this love we are then called to live into it.

It may be challenging to live into, but being Salt and Light is something that is good for us, and good for our world.

Conclusion

Jesus never promised any of his followers an easy ride.
But he did call people to follow him, and he called them to be Salt and Light.

No matter what may happen to us in this world, God promises to be with us.
For me this is very comforting. And I can say I know it not only intellectually,
but also spiritually.

The challenge for us is to accept Jesus, so that we may know Jesus, so that
despite what may happen in the world around us, we will be enabled to
continue to be Salt and Light.

Amen.