

The Second Sunday in Lent
05-03-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 4: 1-4a	Abraham to bring hope to the world
Psalms 121	Assurance of God's Protection
Romans 4: 1-5,13-17	God's promise comes through Faith
John 3: 1-17	Jesus and Nicodemus

Introduction

Today is the Second Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season in our church calendar when we have set aside time to intentionally turn back to God, as we prepare for the celebration of Easter.

Our sentence of scripture for today, comes from our reading from John's Gospel:-

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3.16)

Our readings from the bible this week are about believing and trusting. Another word to describe these things is "Faith".

So today I would like to look at what we mean by "Faith" in the Christian context, what the bible readings tell us about this faith, and what it might mean for our lives if we have this faith.

What do we have Faith in?

Firstly, what do we have faith in? What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

In Christian terms having faith in Jesus is not just about believing that Jesus existed. I don't think there would be any serious historian who did not believe that Jesus existed as an historical person who lived 2000 years ago, but whilst they would believe he existed, many would not call themselves Christians.

I'm actually reading a book at the moment by an atheist philosopher, called "The Godless Gospel". The author is exploring how to take all the references to God out of the Gospels, to look at the teachings of Jesus, and how that might help us to lead a good life. I think he is really twisting himself in knots trying to do it. He doesn't have a Christian faith in Jesus, but he does believe Jesus existed as a person 2000 years ago.

So, Christian faith is more than just believing that Jesus existed, or even that there is a God out there somewhere. It's about putting all of our faith, and all of our hope, and all of our trust in Jesus. It's about believing who Jesus is, and what he has come to earth to do for us, and how we respond.

In John's gospel we hear Jesus telling Nicodemus, that he needs to be "Born from Above", and in other translations of the bible say, "Born Again".

And then we hear Jesus tell Nicodemus,

"What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."
(John 3:6)

Having a Christian Faith, means we have to be spiritually reborn.

For Christians there is no one single way that this happens. It may have been a process that occurred over many years, or it may have come as a sudden conversion, but it is something that needs to have happened in our lives. And it is something that should continue throughout our lives.

Having a Christian Faith is about acknowledging we are cut off from God and cannot save ourselves, it is about accepting what Jesus has done for us, in his life, death and resurrection, and it is about seeking to live as followers of Jesus for our entire lives.

What does this faith do for us?

So, what does having this faith do for us?

Christian Faith connects us to God. Although the bible tells us that we are created in the image of God, it also tells us that we are not perfect.

Whilst in general most of us would say we are trying to live good lives, we all live selfishly at times. We all do things our own way, and not God's way. In fact, the bible tells us that all of us have sinned. We all deserve to be cut off from God, but the wonderful Good News of Jesus, is that through Jesus, we have forgiveness which allows us to be reconciled to God.

In John's gospel today we hear:-

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17)

So rather than thinking we are ok because we were usually trying to do the right thing, the Christian faith is the opposite. The Christian Faith is about

acknowledging that we are not ok with God, but because of what Jesus has done for us, God provides the way back. In the Christian Faith, when we repent it allows us to know, and be assured, we are in a right relationship with God.

The Christian Faith gives us eternal life. Whilst I believe this gives us such a wonderful peace, for those who do not have this faith, it is a difficult concept to understand and often seems irrelevant to the here and now.

Of course, the Christian Faith is also about the here and now.

This year, as we focus on Matthew's Gospel we will hear many parables, where Jesus begins his teaching with, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like"

In the Christian World View, God created the World, and we as human beings are a part of God's creation. We are designed to live in tune with our creator. So, the Christian Faith will provide meaning and purpose for our lives. It gives us hope that there is something to look forward to no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

"The Kingdom of Heaven", is part of the here and now because Jesus came into the world and modelled for us the way to live our best lives.

Once we have Faith, what does that mean for our lives?

And what does having this faith mean for our lives?

We are called to follow Jesus. Abram, who became Abraham is historically before Jesus, but this is how Abram responded to God's call :-

"So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (Genesis 12:4)

It was Abraham's faith in God that called him into action, and it is this faith that is acknowledged in the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans that we heard from today.

The first followers of Jesus were known for the way they were different to others around them. They cared for one another, and they gathered together to worship God, and support one another.

Salvation comes to us only by faith in Jesus, but it is this faith, that then calls us into action.

Just as Abraham responded to God's call on his life, we need to discern in our lives what God might be calling us to do, and then we need to do it.

Conclusion

At Easter we renew our baptismal vows, so in some sense, as we do this, we are being born again in our faith. We declare that this is something that we are continually living into.

So, as we continue our Lenten journey and prepare ourselves for the Celebration of Easter, let us remember that it is our faith in Jesus that saves us, not how good we are, or how much work we've done. Good works should come, as a result of our faith, but good works do not bring us salvation.

It is not what we do, but rather by believing in what Jesus has done for us, that we find life in all its fullness, and we have something to live into.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Amen.