

Reflection – Fourth Sunday of Easter
30/04/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 2: 42-47 The fellowship of the believers

Psalm 23 The Lord is my Shepherd

1 Peter 2: 1-10 Living Stone, Chosen People

John 10: 1-10 Jesus is the Good Shepherd

Introduction

Today, the fourth Sunday of the Easter Season, is often referred to as “Good Shepherd Sunday”. In years A, B, and C of our lectionary readings we have portions of Scripture from chapter 10 of John’s Gospel where Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, and we recite Psalm 23. The first followers of Jesus would have known his teaching on the Good Shepherd, and would have been seeking to model their lives on this.

During the Easter season we also have a series of readings from the “Acts of the Apostles”. This is the earliest history of the church, and includes the lives and stories of those who ate and drank with Jesus, those who listened to the teachings of Jesus, and those who witnessed the Resurrection.

Today, I would like to look through our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, and how those first followers of Jesus responded to Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and how the example of their lives might help us as followers of Jesus today.

Acts 4:42

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Firstly, we hear how the disciples devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. There is a challenge for us as to how much we are devoting ourselves to learning from the Church today. We can easily listen to or read the bible daily and we have access to so many resources in our online world. In many ways there is no excuse for us not to be life long learners, especially when it comes to Jesus. But of course, it requires work and effort on our part.

We need to be diligent in continually seeking to learn more about Jesus, and how to follow him in our lives.

Secondly, we hear the word, Fellowship, and the breaking of bread together. Are we devoted to fellowship? I believed COVID was instrumental in really damaging this aspect of our Church life. Hopefully we will find the energy within ourselves to reconnect with one another as a faith community.

The first Christians would not have envisaged life apart from one another. They only existed in community with one another. We live in a very different world now, but we still need one another, and we still require fellowship with one another if we are to be nourished and strengthened in our faith.

And thirdly, from verse 42, we hear how they prayed together. How diligent are we in our prayer lives? How often do we come together to pray? Prayer is how we commune with God. Prayer is an integral part of our lives as Christians. But again, prayer requires work and effort on our part. We need to form and continue with the habit of prayer in our lives, and as we spend time intentionally with God, we will grow in our relationship with God.

Acts 4:43

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

Are you in Awe of God? How often do you just sit back and marvel at how wonderful our world is, and all that God has done for us? If we are to really experience God's power in our lives, then we first need to be in "Awe of God".

Are you in Awe when you come to Church? Sometimes I would have to say that when we come together as Christians it is not "Awe" inspiring. We need to come to worship together with an expectation that the presence of God will be with us. If we only come with our own wants and needs, or if we complain because it's not exactly what we want, then we will be missing out.

When we come together in worship, we should come with open hearts, expecting to experience the power of God in our lives.

Acts 4:44 - 45

⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

These are very hard words for us to hear today, if we really think about them. Do we hold things in Common?

In one sense we do because our Church Building does not belong to any one individual, and the ability to come and attend worship is open and free to all. But when I really think about it, we don't share that much of our physical possessions with anyone. Our family does seek to tithe to the Church from our income and we seek to be generous with a number of Church mission organizations, but we would have to say we do not share that much of our possessions with other members of the congregation.

Acts 4:46 – 47

. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

We have already discussed meeting together and breaking bread together, and how this helps us, but in our reading from Acts today, we are reminded that in doing this, those first Christians held the good will of others around them.

The challenge before us in this verse is, do our actions as a Christian Community, endear us to the wider community. Do we act in such a way that others will be attracted to us and are we following Jesus in such a way that those around us will have good will towards us.

Acts 4:47

“And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Notice in this verse it was God that added to their number. It was not something they necessarily had control over.

Their job was to follow Jesus and to be witnesses for Jesus. It was actually God, who provided the Growth. The same is true of us today.

But we need as a faith community to review what we are doing if we do not see growth in Christ, as a result of our work.

Conclusion

In some ways, we're probably not really much like those first Christians at all. They lived in a very different cultural context, a very long time ago. And yet we are a lot like them, because we are also seeking to follow Jesus in our lives today.

They really knew Jesus was their Good Shepherd. They felt the Joy, and the Awe, of knowing Jesus in the way that they interacted with one another.

Do we feel it too? Maybe in some way's we do. But from reading about their lives today, it seems there is much we can be working on together, to know God's presence, and to show God's presence, in our common life together. Amen.