

Reflection – Second Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 10)

11/06/2023

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 12: 1-9	God calls Abram to be a blessing to all nations
Psalms 33: 1-12	Praise and Fear the Lord who created Heaven and Earth
Romans 4:13-25	God's promise is realized through Faith in Jesus The example of Abraham
Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26	Jesus calls Matthew Jesus heals a woman, and a girl is restored to life

Introduction

Let us today explore the words of Jesus,

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice”,

as we return to Matthew's gospel, the Gospel we will be focusing on for the rest of the year, after focusing on John's Gospel during the Easter Season.

Context

Firstly, why is Jesus using these words?

He is having a conversation with the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day. Jesus was starting to get a reputation as a teacher, which was supposed to be the role of the Pharisees and Sadducees in society. Also, Jesus had previously healed people and claimed to be able to forgive sins. They are not impressed that he is eating with people who would have been considered “unclean” in their time.

Jesus says to them,

‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’

The words, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”, come from the Prophet Hosea.

Jesus is, more or less, telling the Pharisees to go back to the scriptures and learn what it is to really know and follow God. How God's mercy is meant for all people. Even those who fall short, because the reality is, that we all fall short.

He is calling them away from their blind following of rules and regulations, and calling them to a real relationship with God, where true meaning and purpose is to be found.

So, what is this mercy that Jesus is referring to?

Just as the Jews in the Old Testament continued to turn away from God, and God kept calling them to repent and be reconciled to God, Jesus is challenging the Pharisees to get in tune with God's true will. God want's humanity to thrive and flourish, but when we reject God, we reject God's goodness.

When our focus is on what we are doing, and not on what God has done for us we loose sight of what is really important in life.

We hear in the Book of Genesis (12:3) this morning, that through Abram, and hence through the Jews, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed".

Jesus wanted them, and Jesus wants us, to receive God's mercy, and to live in harmony with God and one another.

Mercy

So how do we see God's mercy play out in today's Gospel reading?

We see it clearly in three people.

Firstly, we see it in the Tax Collector, Matthew. Just as people don't like paying tax today, they didn't like it in Jesus' day either. What made it so much worse in Jesus' day was that Matthew was collecting tax on behalf of Rome, the foreign occupiers, who were dominating the Jewish people. The Pharisees considered Matthew "unclean", someone to be shunned and rejected. Jesus saw Matthew as a human being, created by God, in the image of God, and reached out to Matthew as such.

Jesus called Matthew to follow him, and Matthew responded in faith. Matthew left behind his life as a tax collector, and began a new life following Jesus.

Secondly, we see God's mercy in the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage. Because of her condition, she also would have been considered "unclean". We see in the story today how she doesn't even consider asking Jesus to heal her. To interact with someone may have also made them "unclean", so she didn't risk being rejected by Jesus. But she had faith that he could heal her. Jesus acknowledges her faith, she receives mercy, and is healed.

Finally, we see God's mercy in the raising to life of the synagogue leader's daughter. She is dead, but her father intercedes on her behalf. The synagogue leader had faith in Jesus, and his daughter was restored to life.

Application

Just as we see the liberation in the lives of those three people in the gospel reading, we can see liberation in our lives today if we also place our faith in Jesus.

But what do we need God's mercy to be liberated from today?

We live in a different time and place from Jesus 2000 years ago, but the human condition has not changed. We are still imperfect. We still have fears and doubts and struggle to live good lives.

Even though here in Australia at the beginning of the 21st century, we enjoy one of the highest living standards in the world, we still need God's mercy today.

We see around us homelessness, addictions, mental health issues, and family violence. Even for those of us who may be more fortunate, there are issues around pride and self-centeredness, which cut us off from God. In Australia today we are more likely not to receive God's mercy, because we trust in ourselves and are not open to God.

To accept God's mercy, is to place our faith in Jesus, just like the three people from our Gospel reading today.

They trusted Jesus implicitly. For them it wasn't about blindly following rules and regulations, (although there are many good rules and regulations that we should follow) but rather it was about placing their trust in someone beyond themselves. It was about not relying on their own abilities but trusting in God's faithfulness.

Sometimes God's mercy will involve physical healing, like in the case of the woman and the girl in our gospel today. At other times it may be more psychological or spiritual like the case of Matthew the tax collector.

God is concerned for our whole lives, both physical and spiritual.

To receive God's mercy, we first need to place ourselves into God's mercy.

To place ourselves into God's mercy involves a total surrendering of ourselves to God. If we think really hard about this, it may seem hard and scary. We live in a world where autonomy is prized. To be strong and independent is seen as being successful.

But to really experience God's presence, God's love, and God's forgiveness, then we need to hand over control of our lives and submit to God.

When we submit to God, we receive God's mercy, and we are enabled to live into God's good plans for our lives. God's mercy and God's forgiveness is not something just to be received, rather it is something to be grateful for, and it is something to be celebrated.

Sometimes, I think we know this peace in a theoretical way, but we only think on it fleetingly. It doesn't get deep into our souls and impact our lives. The more we acknowledge what God has done for us in Jesus, the more we acknowledge the mercy God has shown to us, the more we will be drawn into God's peace and presence in our lives.

And as we experience God's peace and presence in our lives, the gratitude will inevitably flow from us, outwards towards others. We will become more, and more, the bearers of God's mercy to the world around us.

Putting all of our faith, and all of our hope, and all of our trust in what Jesus has done for us, will not make all our earthly problems go away instantly, but it will allow us to receive God's mercy, and to know God's peace, and it then enables us to share that mercy and peace with those around us.

Conclusion

God's mercy is something we receive, and it is something that flows out from us.

Are you a person others want to be around?

Is God's mercy flowing from your words and actions?

Living into the mercy that God offers us is something we need to live into, day by day. It is not just an instant change, although it may start like that. It is something we live and grow into, throughout our lives. Matthew the tax collector, kept following Jesus, and took his place as one of the twelve.

Let us today be mindful of how we have received God's mercy, and how we then take our part in sharing that mercy with those around us. Amen.