

Reflection – Third Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 11)

18/06/2023

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 18: 1-15      Sarah laughs when God's messenger says she will  
(21:1-7)                bear Abraham a son

Psalms 116: 1-2, 11-18 I give thanks to the Lord for he has heard me

Romans 5: 1-11        Rejoice in Hope because of what Jesus has done

Matthew 9:35-10:8    Jesus urges to pray for Workers and sends out the 12  
(9-23)

### Introduction

Today there is so much to explore, and learn, and contemplate from our scripture readings. For me the most significant is from Romans 5:1-2 :-

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Paul is assuring the Romans, and us, that peace and hope can be found in this life, by placing our faith in Jesus. But Paul goes on to describe some of the things that we might face, even as we live with this peace and hope. And so today, I would like to delve into the words of Paul in Romans 5:3-5:-

<sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Let us now look at each of these four points that Paul has mentioned, Suffering, Endurance, Character and Hope, in light of our Christian faith

### Suffering

We begin with suffering. I want to say from the outset that suffering is not good. As Christians we should be aspiring to alleviate suffering, just as Jesus did. But we also know that in this fallen and broken world in which we live, suffering is inevitable. We will all suffer in this life. Some less, and some a lot more than others. That is the reality of the world we live in. Sometimes suffering is easily explainable, and at other times it can be excruciatingly bewildering.

For example, if I drink too many beers, I know I will get a headache. That suffering is easily understandable, and the reason is clearly identifiable. Conversely the suffering caused by earthquakes or tsunamis where thousands of people die, is not something we can easily ascribe responsibility or meaning to. I believe there is some suffering that we will never understand this side of the grave.

Quite strangely, Paul is boasting in his suffering. I would like to explore this by looking at an example from this weeks Lindisfarne Business Breakfast. The guest speaker was a very successful young lady, with her own Marketing Company. She graduated from Lindisfarne only 8 years ago, and from her base in Kingscliff she has clients from many countries around the world.

In sharing her life story, she spoke about a cancer diagnosis she received as a 12 year old, and the 2 years of treatment she had to overcome it. Whilst this suffering was not good, she was able to grow through it, and learn from it. Whilst she said she had always been an inquisitive and strong child, I believe living through the suffering, had at least influenced and strengthened her resilience.

I believe it is something similar, that Paul in his letter to the Romans, is trying to convey to us, when he says he boasts in his suffering.

Whilst suffering is not good, it is through suffering that we can often be strengthened and enabled to better live our lives.

There is a great challenge in this for us. We should be seeking to learn and grow, not only in the good times, but also from the sufferings we face.

I believe we can be encouraged to learn from our sufferings, when we know God never abandons us, and is always with us, no matter the circumstances we face in life.

## Endurance

Paul goes on to say that suffering produces Endurance. Here is an attribute that seems a lot more positive. But we only learn endurance by sticking too things. When we think of endurance sports, we don't think of a 100m sprint running race, or a 50m freestyle swim. I'm sure we would think more of running a 42km marathon or swimming the English Channel.

Learning endurance will only come by applying ourselves. No one runs a marathon without training first.

One of the things that I have had to learn endurance with is prayer. You might think that is a strange thing to admit to, but I grew up in a family where doing, and not being was the norm. Our parents had small businesses, so they were always working, and when they weren't working, they were taking us to sport, or some other activity. We did go to Church, but I have had to learn through endurance daily in prayer, that it is not only in the doing, but also in the being that we serve God. And it is only through being immersed in prayer that we are better able to serve God.

My prayer life is very much still a work in progress, but it is something that will improve with endurance.

What is it in your life, that you might benefit from by enduring at?

### Character

Paul then goes on to say that “endurance produces character.”

Character is all about who we are. How we act in the world. Character comes from what we hold dear too, in our lives. Character emerges from our deepest held beliefs, and the things that we want to stand for.

It will influence how other people perceive us to be. We've all heard the saying, “Is this a person of good character?”

When I look around in public life at the moment, it seems to be filled with people who appear to be lacking in character. Politicians, business leaders, sportspeople, the list goes on as to people who seem not to be, “of good character.”

In this I'm tempted at times to be smug, but then I'm always reminded of my own failings and shortcomings, and that my own character could do with some working on.

To have faith in what Jesus has done for us, is to place God at the centre of our lives. If our lives are founded on what God has done for us in Jesus, then the life of Jesus should be coming out in our character.

What are you enduring now that will better shape your character, so that when others see you, they will also be enabled to see Jesus?

## Hope

Finally, in these three verses, Paul goes on to say that “character produces hope.”

When I interview Wedding Couples, I always ask them, “Who is Jesus for you?” I will always remember the answer from one groom, who replied something like this to me:-

“You’ve gotta have hope in life, otherwise what else is there.”

The Hope we have in Jesus, is not a hope in an abstract idea of God, or a hope in a particular ideology about God, but rather Hope in the person of Jesus who has come into our world, in a very real and concrete way.

Jesus came into our world as a human being. He lived and breathed like us, he taught and healed those around him. He called people to follow him, and he tasked his followers with making disciples of all people, throughout the whole world. In his death and resurrection, we are drawn into the love God has for all humanity.

As Christians we primarily believe that God is Love, and because God has been made known to us in Jesus, we can live with Hope.

## Conclusion

The Christian life is something to be lived into. It will no doubt include suffering and require a good deal of endurance. But we also know that through this we will develop character, and that in this we can have what is the ultimate hope.

The Christian life is not necessarily easy, and at times, it may be extraordinarily difficult, but ultimately it is the most rewarding thing we can do with our lives.

To place our faith in Jesus gives us an inner peace that cannot be taken away from us. As St Paul tells us:-

“hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Amen.