

Reflection - 5th Sunday after Pentecost
02/07/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 22: 1-14	Abraham is prepared to sacrifice Isaac
Psalms 13	A Prayer for Help
Romans 6: 12-23	Slaves to Righteousness, Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ
Matthew 10: 40-42	Whoever helps the least of my servants will certainly receive a reward

Introduction

As I was reflecting on this week's scripture readings, I was drawn to the question:-

“Why do we do the things we do?”

So, I would like to look at the themes of “Motivation” and “Reward”, in the light of the bible readings we have had today, and consider what this means for our lives, in the here and now.

Motivation

Firstly, let's look at what motivates us.

If we're honest, we are probably motivated, in the way we behave, by many different factors. Sometimes we want to please others, sometimes we want to do the 'right thing', and sometimes we just want our own way.

What do the readings today tell us about our motivations.

Our first reading from Genesis is a very difficult one to hear, as it talks about human sacrifice. This is clearly something that we consider a great evil. Later on in the Bible, in the book of Leviticus (20:1-5), we hear how God made it clear that this practice was detestable and strictly forbidden. In the time of Abraham however, sacrificing children to the gods was common practice in many of the other ancient religions. Animal sacrifice was standard practice for the Jews, all the way up until just after the time of Jesus. As Australians in the 21st century this is all very foreign to us.

Whilst it is a very challenging story for us to hear, let us look at what we might learn about Abraham's motivation. Throughout Abraham's life we hear how Abraham trusted God. Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for their son Isaac to come along. Isaac was part of God's promise to make Abraham the father of many nations. It's clear that

Abraham's motivation to carry out this sacrifice did not come out of any evil intention towards his son. The motivation of Abraham was to be obedient to God. And why did Abraham want to be obedient to God? Because Abraham trusted God. Abraham's willingness did not come out of malice, but rather out of a willingness to trust God, and be obedient to God. And through Abraham's obedience to God, Abraham's faith in God's goodness is affirmed, Isaac is spared, God provides a ram for the sacrifice, and Abraham grows in his trust and obedience toward God.

In Psalm 13 today we hear the motivation of the Psalmist:-

⁵ Yet I put my trust in your unfailing love:
O let my heart rejoice in your salvation.

The Psalmist is motivated to act, because of the experience of knowing God's "unfailing love".

In today's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans we hear:-

²² But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life.

We can see that Paul is motivated to act in the way he does, because he has been assured of the reward of sanctification and eternal life with God.

We hear in our readings today, about being motivated by God's love for us and trusting God. But why can't we just do our own thing? Why can't we just trust our own desires, and do what we want to do? The definition of just doing what we want, and not what God wants, is "sin". Sin is a very misunderstood word, but basically it is doing things our way, and not God's way. It is our own sin, that cuts us off from God. As Christians we believe that God created the world and we are designed to live in relationship with God, our creator. When we do our own thing, and not what God wants, it is this sin, that cuts us off from God. By placing our faith in what Jesus has done for us, our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled to live in a right relationship with God. So, to be motivated to live in accordance with God, is to be motivated to do what is actually the best thing for our lives.

To be motivated by only what we want may appear to be good for us, and it may even make us feel good initially, but it will not lead to a good life.

If we are motivated by first loving God, and then loving our neighbour as ourselves, then we are much more likely to lead a life that is good, and a life that shows reward.

Let us be more mindful this week, to think about what motivates us? What drives the decisions we make? Is it all about us, or is it also about God, and is it also about others?

Reward

The ultimate reward Christians believe, is of course eternal life with God. This is the Christian Hope we have, because of what Jesus has done for us. It comes to us by faith, and through God's grace to us.

But this reward can seem like it's a long time coming. If we think of the Christian faith as something that doesn't pay out until we die, then it may seem like a long investment to make on something we can't fully comprehend, in this life.

The Christian faith does of course have an ultimate reward, and I believe that by placing our trust in Jesus, we will receive the ultimate reward, and it will be better than anything that we can even begin to imagine, but there is also reward, in this life. To seek to live God's way and not our own way will draw us closer to God, and the closer we are to God, the more God's presence and peace will prevail in our lives.

It doesn't, of course, mean we will only see reward in this life. We only have to think back to the Acts of the Apostles that we read through during the Easter season, to see that the first disciples of Jesus had their fair share of challenges, but it does mean we will have God's peace to live through the challenges we may face in life.

In Today's gospel reading from Matthew we hear:-

⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

We are reminded that those who remain faithful to Jesus will receive a reward.

I recall reading an article on a study conducted in a "New Scientist" magazine which showed Christians who regularly attended church, lived longer than the general population, and were also happier than the general population.

We see in our world how often people are still more likely to want to move from other countries to western democracies, because of the freedom and values which prevail. This freedom and these values did not come from a vacuum, but rather from Christianity which was one of the building blocks of our society.

The ultimate reward for those who accept and follow Jesus, will be better than we can even begin to imagine, and God's peace and presence we receive through the Holy Spirit in our lives, is a wonderful gift we are given, to help us live good lives in the here and now.

The Christian life is not necessarily easy, however it is a life with full reward.

Conclusion

Let us return to the question I posed at the beginning:-

“Why do we do the things we do?”

In thinking about this question, we looked at some of the scriptures we have heard today, and we looked at the aspects of motivation and reward.

I pray this week that we will be motivated to do God’s will, because of what Jesus has done for us. And I pray we will be aware of how God will reward us for our faithfulness.

May we begin our week encouraged by the sentence of scripture from Paul’s letter to the Romans (6:23) :-

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.