

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
30/07/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 29: 15-28	Jacob's marries Leah and Rachel
Psalms 105: 1-11	Give thanks to the Lord, He is wonderful
Romans 8: 26-39	We are more than conquerors, because of Jesus
Matthew 13: 44-58	Jesus tells Kingdom parables, Jesus is rejected in Nazareth

Introduction

Our gospel reading this morning seems to be a smorgasbord. It goes from Jesus telling parables to his being rejected. Over the last couple of weeks, we have been looking at this 13th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel. We've been listening to Jesus tell parables about the kingdom of heaven. Today there are three parts to the Gospel reading. Firstly, we hear more parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. Secondly, we hear Jesus tell the disciples a parable about teachers of the law, and finally we hear of how Jesus is rejected in his home town of Nazareth. I'd like to look at each of these, but in the opposite order today.

Jesus Rejection at Nazareth

Firstly, the Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth. As human beings I don't think there's a lot we fear more than the fear of rejection. As humans we are social beings. Yes, we are all individuals, with our own thoughts and feelings, but it is only in relationships with others that we function as people in society. To be rejected is to have a relationship broken. Whether or not we have done anything to cause the rejection, will probably not make a great deal of difference to how we feel if we are rejected. Even if we've done nothing wrong then rejection occurs, we are bound to be hurt.

I like to look at the example of being made redundant from a workplace in thinking about rejection. The employee receiving the pink slip may have been diligent and hardworking, but due to circumstances beyond their control they find themselves being rejected.

I remember when I was a concrete plant manager, and the Area Manager called and told me we had to cut costs and I needed to get rid of one of the staff members from the office of the plant. I felt terrible sacking her and she cried, even though the whole situation was beyond the control of both of us.

And then there is the whole sphere of rejection in more personal relationships, which can no doubt cause the most pain.

I've often wondered how Jesus might have felt. After all, he was the Son of God. But he was also very much human, with human feelings.

Here, Jesus was rejected, not by people he didn't know, but by those of his own town. Those he grew up with, those he knew from when he was a child.

I think this would have caused him great pain.

In the last verse we hear Matthew say:-

And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

I have no doubt that it was the peoples lack of belief that restricted their experiencing more of God's miraculous power among them, but I think Mark paints Jesus in a much more human light in his Gospel when he says:-

He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

If the work of Jesus can be affected by rejection, how much more susceptible to the adverse effects of rejection might we be. I think our relationship with Jesus is critical in helping us when we face rejection, but also important is our relationships and the support we should receive from other Christians. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he sent them out in pairs so that they might support each other in the rejection that they may have faced. Likewise, I think it is important that we both seek and give support to our fellow Christians.

Parable on Teachers of the Law

Next, I'd like to look at the parable Jesus told, for those who would be teachers of the law. After telling a number of parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus turns to his disciples, and we hear:-

⁵¹ 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' ⁵² And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

This is not a very well known parable, probably because it is not about a general part of life, but rather specific to those who would be teachers.

Here the teacher is the master of the house and the Storeroom filled with treasure, I would consider to be the Scriptures. Now Jesus doesn't just say a teacher has to bring out the treasure. He doesn't even say bring out the Old and then the New. He says bring out the New as well as the old. This emphasis on bringing out the new, I believe is Jesus' way of saying that the Gospel needs to be made relevant to everyone in their 'specific time' and their 'specific place'.

The Kingdom of Heaven

Let's now look at the parables of the Kingdom. In these parables we've just heard, Jesus begins with the words, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..."

Today we have heard three such parables, but the whole of chapter thirteen is filled with Jesus telling parables about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Over the last couple of weeks, we heard parables such as, the 4 soils, and the weeds among the wheat. Jesus uses all these things familiar to the people in their everyday lives to talk about the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, Matthew has Jesus beginning his ministry with these words in Matthew 4:17 :-

“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near”

So how do we understand the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus often said that in him the Kingdom of Heaven had arrived, but there is also constant reference to a future event, often referred to as the Judgment. So, the Kingdom of Heaven is among us “now” through Jesus. Through his incarnation, through his life, his death and his resurrection, and yet the Kingdom of Heaven is also “not yet” as we await his second coming. It is something we hope for, something we eagerly anticipate. We say “Your kingdom come” every time we recite the Lord’s prayer.

But the word Kingdom seems to me though, to be a word we probably don’t relate well to in the 21st century. It conjures up fairytale images and is specific to a certain area. In the psalm today we hear of a God who does wonderful acts whose judgments are in all the earth. The word “Kingdom” doesn’t seem to be big enough for what Jesus is talking about. To me swapping the word Kingdom for Rule and swapping the word Heaven for God giving the phrase “Rule of God” might be more meaningful for us as we think about the phrase Kingdom of Heaven. It seems to be more all embracing.

So as Christians we see the “Rule of God” as current in the world, and yet still something that is being worked out.

Opposite to the Kingdom of Heaven

And how then does the Devil fit into all this?

The devil has been well and truly defeated by Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, our sins, and the sins of the whole world were forgiven. And in Jesus’ resurrection, we have hope for our own resurrection. But evil still exists.

I like the analogy which uses the end of World War Two in Europe, to try to explain the current state of the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s not perfect but I think it can help.

On the 6th June 1944 D-Day occurred. The allies invaded France in massive numbers both from the sea and the air. It was clear after this day that the allies would win the war and that Germany would lose, but it wasn’t until May 1945 almost a year later that Germany surrendered.

As Christians, Easter was our D-Day, but we haven’t yet reached the end of the war. The devil still lurks to try to trap us, but in Jesus we have full power over him.

The Parables of Hidden Treasure, Pearls & a Fishing Net

Let’s look now at the individual parables of the Kingdom.

The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, both portray the Kingdom of Heaven as the most valuable thing you can possess. Both the man who found the hidden treasure and the Merchant who found the fine Pearl, were willing to give up everything else they owned so that they could be assured of possessing their find. It's interesting to see that there wasn't a sense of begrudgingly having to part with all their other possessions. Specifically, the man who found the treasure in the field, joyfully sold everything else just to get the field.

I would like to pose the question, "Is there anything that you hold more precious than knowing God through Jesus?" I've actually heard some people say that their children are more important to them than God. Most wouldn't say it, but we often treasure our earthly possessions too highly, especially when we have worked very hard to attain them. As Australians I believe our wealth can be a great barrier to experiencing the presence of God's Kingdom in our lives. These parables remind us that we should not let anything in our lives stop us from taking our place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that being a part of God's Kingdom is the most valuable thing we can possess.

In the final Kingdom parable, we are warned in the story of the sorting, of the fish, about when Jesus will come again. This parable is very similar to the weeds and the wheat we heard last week. The time of the Kingdom we live in now contains both good and bad. We must live with that until the final sorting is done.

Conclusion

Well, we've covered a lot from the gospel reading today.

There is no doubt that we will all experience rejection to varying degrees in our lives. We may face rejection through the normal processes of being in relationships which fail, or we may face rejection, specifically because of our faith in Jesus.

But despite the fact we will face rejection, we can know that in Jesus coming among us and sharing our humanity, we can have a treasure in our lives that is beyond compare. Knowing God through Jesus is the best thing that can ever happen to us, and it is a treasure that can't be taken away from us.

I'd like to conclude with these words of reassurance from today's sentence taken from Paul's letter to the Romans:-

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:38,39)

Amen.