

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
20/08/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 45: 1-15	Joseph makes himself known to his brothers
Psalms 133	The Joy of Good Relationships
Romans 11: 13-32 (33-36)	Grafted and Broken Branches The wonder of God's mercy
Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28	It's what's in your Heart, not what you eat that makes you unclean Canaanite Woman's Daughter healed by Faith

Introduction

This morning I would like to focus on two themes that I believe came through very strongly in today's bible readings.

The first is that God loves each and every person on this planet.

The second is that as Christians, we are called to embrace God's love and live in unity with one another.

God Loves us All

The first theme that I would like to explore today is God's love for all Humanity.

It's very easy to say that God loves everyone, but we only have to look at our own lives to see how strange an idea this really is. When I think about it there are some people that I meet and I instantly like and feel good talking to them, and then there are other people I meet and I know that I would rather not spend a lot of time with them. If we're honest, I'm sure you could all think of examples like this in your lives.

But God loves each and every one of us equally.
God loves you, and God loves me.

Nothing good we do will make God love us any more, and nothing bad we do will make God love us any less.

Probably the most well known verse in John's Gospel, is John 3:16 :-

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

When we hear Jesus say, "The World", he doesn't mean some nations over other nations, or some people over other people, but the whole world, all of humanity.

I remember as a young primary school child, I had a friend who was Greek, and he was adamant that God loved the Greek Orthodox better, because they were part of the church from the start. I knew instinctively in my mind that this wasn't true, but at the time I didn't have the words or the understanding to engage with him.

In today's Gospel reading, as we hear of the interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, we see how God has come for all humanity. Matthew's Gospel is considered the most Jewish of the Gospels and was aimed at Jewish readers. They would not have considered the Canaanites people that God's Messiah should have dealings with, let alone provide miraculous cures for. We hear how the disciples wanted Jesus to send the woman away. The Jews of Jesus' day clearly knew they were God's chosen people, but they had narrowed their view, from God's original charge to Abraham that they were to be a blessing to "All People".

Jesus had arrived to dispel their incorrect view that God only loved the Jews. Yes, the Jews were God's chosen people, but they were chosen for a task to bring God's love to all people. In Jesus, the task of bringing God to all humanity, has found its fulfillment, and Jesus showed that, as he interacted with people like the Canaanite woman, and how at the end of Matthew's Gospel Jesus gave the great commission to his followers:-

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

We also hear in the reading from Paul's letter to the Romans today how Paul likens all people to an olive tree. Some are the original branches, and some are wild branches that are grafted in, in this, we know that God cares for all the branches.

Paul is warning the Romans though, that remaining grafted into the olive tree depends on putting your faith in Jesus. Just as Jesus commends the faith of the Canaanite woman, Paul warns the Romans that unless they remain faithful to Jesus, they are in danger of being cut from the olive tree.

So, we hear in the scripture readings today that God loves us all, and God calls us all to be reassured and kept in that love by remaining faithful to Jesus.

It's Good to Live in Unity

The second theme from today's bible readings is that of Unity.

Unity is something that I think we can be naturally drawn into. Look at how over the last couple of weeks our nation has got behind the Matilda's and supported them.

But unity is something that takes a lot of hard work. Just as a marriage between two people takes commitment, and dedication and sacrifice, for it to last a lifetime,

So too, this commitment, and dedication and sacrifice is required of us, to one another, as part of the “Body of Christ” known as St Cuthbert’s Tweed Heads.

I wonder if we actually think of it like that? Are we committed to one another, here in this faith community, like we might be committed to our own families?

We have heard today in Psalm 133:-

¹ Behold how good and how lovely it is: when families live together in unity.

When we think of this, let us not only think of our own biological families, and our faith community here at St Cuthbert’s, but also our family of Christian Brothers and Sisters here in our local community and all around the world.

Today we have heard from our two local special religious education teachers who attend the Tweed River, Banora Point and Kingscliff High Schools and share the gospel with over 400 students.

They are only able to be there because fifteen years ago ten local churches joined together in unity and formed the Tweed Coast Christian Education Association. By continuing to support this local association we are continuing to join in unity, to share God’s Good News with young people in our area.

God not only calls us to respond in faith to the love that God has for us, but God calls us to live in unity with our fellow Christians, so that God’s love might be made known to all humanity.

Conclusion

Today as we dwell on the readings we have heard from the bible, may we be assured of God’s love for us all, and continue to respond in faith.

And as we continue to grow in our own faith journey, may we continue to seek to live in unity with our fellow Christians.

And I pray that we will display this unity, in such a way, that those who are not Christians will be drawn to know and experience the love of God through Jesus in their lives. Amen.