

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
24/09/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 16: 2-15 God provides manna and meat in the wilderness

Psalms 105:1-6,37-45 Praise the Lord, He saved Israel in the desert

Philippians 1 Paul urges to stand up for the Gospel

Matthew 20:1-16 Parable of Workers paid equally

Introduction

Today as we listen to the scriptures, I would like to explore two themes.

Firstly, God's wonderful provision and love for us.

And secondly, how do we show gratitude for God's wonderful provision for us.

God's Provision

So, let's look at how God provides for us.

Last week we focused on God's primary provision, in sending Jesus so that we can be forgiven and reconciled to God.

In reading from Exodus and psalm today, we have a much more physical aspect to God's provision. We hear how God provides for his chosen people the Israelites, as they are being led by God, to the promised land. Despite their whining, and rejecting God, by worshipping a Golden Calf, God continues to provide for them, with bread and meat coming to them daily, as God eventually leads them to the promised land.

Here in Australia, in the 21st century, I think we are a bit like that. I know many people are struggling, but as a society we do have the resources so that people should be able to get the food and shelter they need to live. It is rare for us in Australia not to have the physical necessities of life. Sometimes I think we get stuck with a glass half empty mentality, rather than a glass half full mentality, and really being grateful, and thankful, and acknowledging the things that we do have.

And not only does God provide for our physical needs, God provides for our Spiritual needs. God cares for us as complete people. We are physical beings and yet we talk about having hearts, and souls, and minds. There is clearly a lot more to our lives than just the physical. And God cares for our whole beings. In talking to someone recently about the joy of the Christian faith, I recalled the words of St Augustine about God:-

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Our sentence of scripture for today from Ephesians says this, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

God's love is not something that we have to earn, but rather it is God's gift to us, if we chose to accept it.

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians today, we hear how Paul is so secure in God's love that he even has no concerns about dying. Not that he wants to die. In fact, he goes on to say that he knows he will live for now as God has work for him to do.

I wonder if we really embrace how secure we are in God's love? Our culture and society has a general fear of death, so much so, that I think it is one of the last taboo subjects for general conversation. And yet the reality is we will all die at some stage. St Paul was so secure in God's love, that he knew death would be for him the way to be with God forever. I wonder if we really know God like that? I wonder if we really embrace God like that? Sometimes I think we get so caught up in the world around us that we don't appreciate how much we are loved by God. And when we don't appreciate it, or fully understand it, the power of God's love is not fully revealed in our lives.

I think the first part of today's Collect prayer sums up how much God loves us:-

Loving and righteous God,
your boundless generosity exceeds all that we can desire or deserve,
and you give to the last worker all you promised to the first.

God has given us life, God provides for our physical needs, and in Jesus we can know we are secure in God's love forever.

Gratitude in Life

So, if we can know that we are eternally secure in God's love, how are we to live?

I believe that the readings today are calling us into living lives which demonstrate gratitude for the physical things we have, for the love that God has given to us in Jesus.

I think more and more though, our society is leading us to live with a sense of entitlement, rather than a sense of gratitude. We hear things like, "You should really get that for yourself, you deserve it," or we see how leaders of corporations will treat customers and workers badly to maximize profits.

Just as Christians in Jesus day were called to be countercultural, as Christians today we also need to be countercultural in living with a sense of gratitude in our lives.

The second part of our Collect prayer today puts it like this:-

liberate us from all jealousy and greed, that we may be free to love and serve others, and in your service may find our true reward;

The first two verses from psalm 105 today are great for helping us to show gratitude directly to God:-

¹ O give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name:
tell among the peoples what things he has done.

² Sing to him, O sing praises: and be telling of all his marvellous works.

I encourage you to be grateful to God for the love we have in Jesus.

And in terms of living lives of gratitude with our fellow Christians we hear in Paul's letter to the Philippians:-

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,

In today's parable of the labourers in the vineyard, we hear a story of God's generous love. If we think of the story in a worldly way, we can even feel a sense of unfairness for those who worked for the whole day. But they received all they were entitled to. They weren't taken advantage of. They were paid in full. They should have been grateful, but they got stuck in comparisons.

Sometimes we can lose sight of the things we should be grateful for, when we compare ourselves with those who have more than we do.

I encourage you to be grateful for your family.

I encourage you to be grateful for your friends.

I encourage you to be grateful for being able to Worship God here today.

I encourage you to be grateful for all the many possessions you have.

I encourage you to take the time to think of all the people, and events, and things, that make up your life, and then take the time to give thanks to God for them.

Being grateful means, we don't take things for granted, we don't just expect to be given things, but rather we give thanks to God for the good things that we are blessed with.

Conclusion

In Jesus we can be assured of God's love for us. We should be grateful to God for this. And we should also be grateful for all the physical blessings we receive.

I saw a wonderful sign once that said:- "Gratitude is an Attitude"

May we live grateful and thankful lives, so that we might know God's presence and peace, and be enabled to serve others.

And as we serve both God and those around us, may we find our true reward. Amen.