

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost [Ord 32]
12-11-2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Joshua 24: 1-3a, 14-25 With Joshua's example, the Israelites decide to follow God

Psalms 78: 1-7 Passing on confidence in God to the next generation

1 Thessalonians 4: 9-18 Love one another
We have hope in Jesus – He will return

Matthew 25: 1-13 Jesus tells the parable of the 10 bridesmaids.

Introduction

Welcome again everyone, as we continue our journey of exploration into Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

In the portion of scripture that we have heard today from chapter four we first hear Paul urging them to continue to love one another. Then we hear Paul wanting them not to grieve, as others do, and so reminding them again, of the hope they have found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And finally, we hear Paul reminding them that they will ultimately all be with God, and so they are to encourage one another.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Lets begin with verses 9-12:-

⁹ Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰ and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, ¹¹ to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, ¹² so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one.

As Christians we are called to love one another. We all know this. It is not new. When Jesus is asked, what is the most important way to live your life, he replies by saying, "Firstly Love God, and Secondly love your neighbour as yourself."

So, we know we are called to love one another, and sometimes it is a joy and a pleasure to love those who you are getting on with, but sometimes, loving someone we are not seeing eye to eye with, can be the hardest thing in the world to do.

Yet we need to continue, to seek to love one another.

Paul commended the Thessalonians that they already loved one another, but he urged them to do so more and more. We may think we're doing ok, and even if we are doing a reasonable job of showing care and consideration for our fellow

Christians, we are urged to do so more and more. One of the traits of Paul in his ministry was to keep going. He goes from city to city sharing the gospel, starting churches and never stopping. Our life circumstances will change over time, but Paul's message to the Thessalonians, and the example of his life is to continue to endure in showing God's love to others. The specific things we are able to do may change over time, but we need to endure in showing Christian love to others.

Paul also gives some tips to the Thessalonians on how to live lives that show love towards others. He calls them to :-

“aspire to live quietly, mind their own affairs and work with their hands”.

What does it mean for us to “live quietly”? As I read these words, I was drawn to a line in the famous poem *Desiderata*,

”Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit.”

To aspire to live quietly, is not to be a person who doesn't make any literal noise, but rather, to live quietly is to not unnecessarily be disruptive or place burdens on others.

We are called to live peaceably with others. We are called to do our best to get on with others. We are called to seek the good of others. We are called to, not only say we care about our fellow Christians, but to show it in practical ways, ways that avoid conflict and ways that promote unity. We hear in the Acts of the Apostles how the first Christians sold their possessions and pooled all the money together for the benefit of all. We may not be being called to such radical steps here at St Cuthbert's in the 21st century, but we are called to seek to live quietly with one another.

What does it mean for us to “mind our own affairs”? I think this one is easier to get, but not necessarily any easier to avoid. We are called not to Gossip about others. This also can be a challenge for us to live out in community. If someone does something that I don't like, I'm often tempted to tell everyone else about it, but not talk in a constructive way to the other person involved. As we live out our lives in Christian community, we are to seek to mind our own affairs.

What does it mean for us to “work with our hands”? With the call for those in the Christian community to show love and charity to one another, some may have abused the situation to use the resources of others to live, when they were capable themselves. In this, it seems to me that Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to rely on others when they need to, but also to pull their own weight when they can. So, we too, are called to do what we can to provide for our own lives and to use the skills, gifts and talents God has given us to build up the faith community.

In all these ways of looking at our own lives, we are called to continue to seek to love one another.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Let us now explore verses 13 and 14 :-

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

In these verses Paul is bringing the Thessalonians right back to the heart of the Gospel message that he had initially brought to them. In the time since Paul had left them, members of the church may have died, and they may have been struggling with the loss of loved ones.

Paul is not telling them not to grieve at all. It is natural for us to grieve the loss of loved ones, but Paul is telling them not to grieve as others do who have no hope. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the wonderful hope that those who accept Jesus will also live into his death and resurrection. This hope is that despite what happens we cannot be separated from the love of God. Christians are first and foremost people of Hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

And finally let us explore verses 15 to 18 :-

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

In these verses we hear Paul seeking to encourage them with a vision of the Hope that we have. I believe we can be sure of the hope we have because of the resurrection, but I don't think we can be sure of what it will be exactly like because we haven't experienced it yet.

Whilst there are many examples of people who have died and come back to life, the Christian hope is of a time when Jesus will return, and that hasn't happened yet.

I would like to share with you an example to help us think about what happens after our life on this earth has ended. Imagine a person who has been blind from birth and then imagine trying to explain to them what the colour red looks like, or what the colour blue looks like. You might tell them that red is a warm colour and blue is a cool colour, and it might give them a bit of an inkling of the difference, but it probably won't make it that much clearer.

Likewise, I believe heaven will be better than we can even begin to imagine. To be in God's presence will be amazing beyond our wildest dreams. But as we're not yet there, we can't now know the specifics of what it will be like.

What we can know is that the Hope Jesus gives us is real, and it can sustain us.

Conclusion

In the nine verses we have explored today, we have been reminded of the wonderful hope we have in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have been encouraged to live in love for one another, and we have been reminded that the Christian faith gives us a life filled with Hope, that we are eternally secure in God's love.

Just as Paul told the Thessalonians in today's final verse:-

"Therefore encourage one another with these words."

I pray that we have been encouraged by these words, and I pray that we will continue to be encouraged, to live out our lives, seeking to love one another, assured of the hope that Jesus gives us. Amen.