

Reflection - The First Sunday in Lent
18-02-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Genesis 9:8-17 God gives the rainbow as a sign of his covenant after the flood
- Psalms 25: 1-10 God protect me and show me your ways
- 1 Peter 3:18-22 Christ died for us. Baptism is a sign of God's covenant with us, like the ark that came through the flood.
- Mark 1: 9-15 Baptism of Jesus, Jesus in the wilderness
Jesus calls people to repentance.

Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent is a time in our church calendar set aside as a penitential time. A time to reflect, and to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter. Today, as we reflect on the scriptures, I would like us to focus on the sentence of scripture, taken from the Gospel reading:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

These are the first words of Jesus recorded in Mark's gospel. Today I would like to look at both “repentance”, and “believing in the good news”, and how they go together, and how you can't have one without the other.

Repentance

Firstly, repentance. What does it mean to repent? Many people probably see it as just saying sorry. Repentance does involve saying sorry, but it's so much more than that. The Greek word used in the gospels that we have translated into “repent” is “metanoia”. Metanoia isn't only about being sorry, but literally, “to change your mind, to change direction”

So, when Jesus calls us to repent, he's not just calling us to say sorry. It's actually a call, to change the direction of our lives. But what are we changing from, and what are we changing to?

We are changing from living the way we might want to live (ie doing whatever we want, doing things our own way) and changing to living the way Jesus would want us to live (ie Believing the Good News and doing God's will).

But before we get onto believing the Good News, let's continue to look at repentance.

Repentance is about more than just saying sorry, but it does involve saying sorry to God. We've all done things our own way, at times, and not God's way. We've all had times when we've been selfish or hurt others. I'm sure there will also have been times when we've been inattentive to the needs of others. The biblical word for doing things our own way and not God's way is "sin". Sometimes I think this word can be unhelpful, because we only associate it with things that are really bad, for example, "like someone being in jail for premeditated murder", or we associate it with things that we think we will enjoy, but we think will be bad for us, that is "that chocolate is so good that it's sinful". Either way it doesn't really get to the true meaning of the word, and it can confuse us.

Sin is real, for each and every one of us, and it is something we need to address in our lives. There are a number of traps that people can fall into. One is thinking, I've never done anything really bad, so I'll be ok. But we all sin, so none of us are really ok in our own right. Another is that we know and sense we have done the wrong thing at times, but we don't think that God will forgive us. If we don't repent, then we remain cut off from God. The whole reason Jesus came to earth as God in human flesh like us, is so that we can be reconciled to God. If we repent, God will forgive.

Sin is doing things our way and not God's way, and to repent means to change our mind, to do things God's way and not our own way. The problem with sin, is that it cuts us off from the good and proper relationship that we are designed to live in, with God.

And sin can take two forms. There are sins of commission, the times when we have done the wrong thing. And there are sins of omission, the times when we have done nothing to stop something bad happening, or when we have failed to do something that we should have done.

The reality is, that we all sin, but the wonderful "Good News" is that, in Jesus we can all receive forgiveness, and enter into a right relationship with God.

In the first letter of Peter today we hear these words,

"For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God."

The first two questions we are asked at baptism are, "Do you turn to Christ?" and "Do you repent of your sins?" Repenting and believing the good news go hand in hand together, you can't have one without the other.

So, we are called to repent, and when we repent, God forgives us, and we enter into God's love and forgiveness.

Believing in the Good News

Of course, we can't repent, until we know what to repent of. Unless we know Jesus is the "Good News", we don't have anything to turn our lives around to.

Sometimes people equate Christianity with some kind of old fashioned morality, and don't get me wrong, if we are Christians we should be living lives, that those around us will see as good and virtuous. Those who are not Christians should be drawn to us by the way we love one another, but the Christian faith is about so much more than just good ethics.

Christianity became known as Good News, because that is exactly what it is, Good News. In fact, as Christians, we believe it is not just good news, it is actually the "best news".

As Christians we believe God created this world in which we live. God also created us in God's own image, to live in harmony with God and with one another. But God also gave us the freedom and the opportunity to make choices in our lives. This is where sin came in, and as human beings we have a propensity to want to do things our own way and not God's way. Throughout history, God called people to into covenant with God. This morning in the old testament reading from the book of Genesis, we hear of the covenant God made with humanity after the flood, and the sign of the bow in the sky that represented that covenant. The rainbow and God's promise not to flood the whole earth again is a covenant which prefigures the covenant we make with God through Baptism.

So, "believing in the good news" is more than just behaving well, or knowing that there is a God out there somewhere.

"Believing in the Good News" is about coming into a relationship with God through Jesus. It's about turning our lives toward God, and living our lives for God.

"Believing in the Good News" is about entering into a covenant with God. Accepting God's promises of love and forgiveness, and in turn, promising to love God back.

We have to experience the good news, to really know that it is, good news.

Despite our own brokenness, we can be in a right relationship with God.

Jesus brings us to God.

Jesus promises forgiveness.

Jesus promises to be with us forever.

And Jesus came calling all Humanity to live into this promise.

Conclusion

As we go out from worship today, as we continue our Lenten journey, let us be mindful that God has promised us forgiveness. It is not something that we have to earn, it is not something we have to work for. It is God's promise to us when we accept what Jesus has done for us. But it is something we are called to live into. And if we have accepted and know the power of God's wonderful promises, then we should want to live into them. As we begin our Lenten Journey, I pray that we will be enabled, to take the time, to live into the promises of God.

And I pray that as we live into God's promises we will know God's love and peace, flowing more and more, into our lives. Amen.