

Reflection - The Third Sunday in Lent
03-03-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Exodus 20: 1-17	The Ten Commandments
Psalms 19	Heaven and Earth proclaim God's glory
1 Corinthians 1: 18-25	Christ is the power and wisdom of God The meaning of the Cross
John 2: 13-22	Jesus - Clearing the temple - Predicting his resurrection.

Introduction

Today's readings are about God's Law. I'd like us to look at how these readings might point us to two central elements of the Christian Faith:-

- What it means to be a Christian.
- Why and how should we live by God's Laws as Christians.

To be a Christian

Firstly, what does it mean to be a Christian. Over the years I've had quite a few discussions with people inside and outside of the church and I find there is a lot of general confusion about what it is to be a Christian.

I've heard some people say it's being a good person, but that can't be all that is required, because I've met people who tell me they are atheists, and they seemed like pretty good people to me.

Another person once told me they were a Christian, because they lived by the ten commandments, but they didn't want to go to church or pray. I didn't know them that well, so I didn't challenge them strongly on the first four of the Ten Commandments which are all about loving God.

Another, quite well meaning person told me they were a Christian because they believed there was a "God" out there somewhere, but they weren't sure about connecting with this God. Just believing there is a God somewhere can't make you a Christian, because as Jesus said even the devil believes God exists.

Put simply, a "Christ-ian" is someone who believes and wants to follow Jesus Christ in their life.

As Christians, we believe we have been created by a God who knows us personally, and loves us. We believe we are not perfect and as such are cut off from God. We believe that by trusting in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we can receive forgiveness and be reconciled to God. We believe that it is not about what we do, but rather by accepting what Jesus has done for us that makes us Christian. And then as Christians, once we have experienced God's grace, we should be drawn to want to follow Jesus in our lives.

What do we do if we are a Christian

So, Christians are people who want to follow Jesus in their lives.

If we call ourselves Christians, then how are we to live?

Living your life as a Christian is not about laws per se, but rather it is about a change of heart.

If in our hearts, we have accepted all that God has done for us in Jesus, then we should be drawn to find out more about the bible and how God has planned good lives for us to live. Following God's laws in our lives should be something we want to do. It might not necessarily be easy, but it should be something we are drawn to, and it should be something we aspire to.

God's Law

So today we're going to talk about living by God's law, but I'd like to preface what I have to say, by first looking at some of what St Paul had to say, in his letter to the Romans.

In Romans 3:21-23 we hear:-

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law has been known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

And then in Romans 3:31 we hear:-

"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather we uphold the law."

So, if we have this faith, then we will be drawn to seek God's wisdom for our lives and to live by God's law's.

Summary of God's Law - The Ten Commandments

So, let's now look at living by God's laws. I think most people have heard of the Ten Commandments, but I would question how many people can list them one to ten, without looking them up.

The word "commandment" itself is very imposing and I think there is a big fallacy in many people's minds about what the ten commandments are. I think many people would view God's laws and the bible as a rule book which stops them having fun. The reality though, is that the ten commandments are not about onerous restrictions being placed on our lives, but rather putting into place ways to live so that we can have freedom to enjoy life.

Let's look at some examples to see how this works.

Imagine a soccer game with 2 teams of eight year old boys, and imagine there is no referee and no defined field and no goal posts, and you told them to just go out and play soccer. I think you would just have utter chaos. But if you put the appropriate structures in place the children can have fun and actually enjoy playing the game.

Or what about if no one ever broke commandment number eight, no stealing, how free would I be not to walk around with the big lump of keys in my pocket.

So, God gives us these laws not for any punitive reason because he wants to punish us but rather because he wants to protect us. The laws that God gives us don't take away our freedom, but rather if they are obeyed, they give us a freedom in which to live happy lives. God gives us laws to live by because he loves us.

Our reaction to God's Laws

Let's now look at how we react to God's laws.

If we accept Jesus into our lives, then we know we have a firm support. We can grow in faith. And as our relationship with Jesus grows, we can also see growth in our ability to live lives that honour him.

Yet as I quoted a little earlier from St Paul:-

"All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God"

We can continue to grow, and as we follow God's laws our lives can be lived wonderfully for God. This benefits us and it benefits those with whom we live, yet we can't escape our sinful nature. That's why God sent Jesus to earth for us.

Jesus as Fulfillment of Law

For us as Christians, Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. And I'd like to go back to the Old Testament to explain this.

After they received the Ten Commandments, the Israelites eventually settled in the land of Canaan. After many years a temple was built to house the ark of the covenant, which contained the law God gave to Moses for them.

By the time of Jesus' ministry, the temple was at the centre of Jewish life. A whole system had been put in place to uphold the law and to help the people who broke it to find a way back to a right relationship with God. The faithful loved God's law. They recited it and its application night and day. A sacrificial system had also been developed so if, and when, they broke the law the people could offer the proper sacrifice at the temple to have their relationship with God restored.

This is the temple scene in which we see Jesus in the Gospel reading today. Jesus could see that those in power were not allowing the system to work as God intended.

Rather than being a place where people were enabled to restore their relationship with God, the inside of the temple had actually become a marketplace. The actual location of the marketplace within the temple, and the profiteering, by the merchants, the moneychangers and the religious leaders who controlled the temple, was actually making it harder for the people to restore their relationship with God. In the Gospel today we hear how Jesus was obviously unhappy with the situation.

The coming of Jesus changed the whole covenant of the Law.

The new covenant which Jesus established no longer requires animal sacrifice, but rather faith in Him.

Jesus said:-

“Destroy this temple and I will build it up in three days.”

And Jesus also abolished the sacrificial system that operated out of the temple on that first Good Friday. He became the final and ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord has replaced both the building and its sacrificial system.

People no longer need to practice that sort of sacrifice to be in a right relationship with God. Jesus the new temple makes it possible to have a relationship with him through faith.

In all that Jesus has done for us he has fulfilled the law.

Conclusion

I pray that as we acknowledge what Jesus has done for us, we will continually be encouraged to follow God's laws.

For us, God's laws have been summed up by Jesus in the two great commandments – Love God. Love each other.

I think most in our secular society would try to live by the second one of loving your neighbour, but I believe unless we begin with the first and most important commandment of loving God, then we will struggle to love others as ourselves.

If we experience God's love for us and accept Jesus, then rather than struggle, I believe we are given the urge to live in accordance with God's Laws.

I'd like to end by praying our collect prayer again.

Lord our God,
by your Holy Spirit
write your commandments upon our hearts
and grant us the wisdom and power of the cross,
so that, cleansed from greed and selfishness,
we may become a living temple of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**