

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
22-12-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Micah 5: 2-5a A ruler will come from Bethlehem to bring Peace.

Psalm – Song of Mary – Magnificat – My soul magnifies the Lord.

Hebrews 10: 5-10 Jesus came into the world to be the Sacrifice,
Once for All.

Luke 1:39-45 Mary visits Elizabeth.

Introduction

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. The Advent season is a time set aside in our church calendar to prepare, both for the celebration of Christmas, and also, for when Jesus will come again.

The theme for today is Love. As I read through the Bible readings set down for today, the reading for Hebrews makes it clear that God sent Jesus for everyone. The rest of the readings speak about the fulfilment of God's plans for the world.

So today I would like to look at the theme :-

“Love is the Fulfillment of God's Plans for Us.”

Fulfillment

What do you think of when you hear the word “Fulfillment”.

When I think of it, it's usually in a positive way. It infers that something has been achieved. Something that was anticipated has come to fruition. When we think of the word fulfillment, we would usually associate it with the idea that something good that was planned has happened.

Let us now look at what today's bible readings tell us about fulfillment.

Our first Bible reading from the prophet Micah, talks about the one who will bring peace coming from Bethlehem. All through the Old Testament, which were the Jewish Holy Books of Jesus' day, the prophets looked to the coming of a Messiah.

The Jews were actually waiting for the fulfillment of what had been given to them by God through the prophets. In Jesus time, the Romans had conquered Jerusalem and put local puppet kings, like King Herod in charge. So, in Jesus' time, the Jewish people were really looking forward to the fulfillment of the prophecy that a Messiah would come. In the Internet series – “The Chosen” it is quite poignant how the first disciples are portrayed as really questioning, “Could this Jesus be the Messiah? Could he be the one we have been waiting for?”

For us as Christians the answer is a resounding “Yes!”. Just as the prophet Micah had looked to a ruler who would bring peace coming from Bethlehem, for us as Christians today, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plans for our world.

Let us now look at fulfillment from our Gospel reading and the Song of Mary. This is a much more personal story. It is the story of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth, and how they respond to one another and to God.

Now there seems to have been quite an age difference between the two of them. Elizabeth was said to be past childbearing age, whereas Mary was quite young, only a teenager. And yet this is how Elizabeth greets Mary:-

‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.’

That doesn't sound like a normal greeting between pregnant women. I recall the joy when Leeza was pregnant with our first child. So, yes, we were excited, and yes, we were happy, but these words of Elizabeth suggest something much more significant is also going on with Mary.

And Mary's response is also significant, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord: my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, Who has looked with favour on his lowly servant: from this day all generations will call me blessed;”

As we hear these words and picture the two women sharing with one another about their pregnancies, we see how something much bigger is also going on. Whilst the joy and challenges of childbirth are universal, they seem to both be aware that there is a significance beyond the normal, and that in them God's plans for the world were being fulfilled.

These pregnancies are integrally linked to God's good plans in bringing Jesus into our world. Mary says, “from this day all generations will call me blessed;”

And 2000 years later that is still happening.

Love is Fulfillment

As Christians we know that God has brought Jesus as the Messiah, because “God loves us”.

In John 3:16 we hear these words:-

“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.”

And in our reading from Hebrews 10:10 today we hear:-

“And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

The incarnation is integral to our Christian faith. Jesus becoming a human being in every physical respect like us, but also being God, is a big idea to get our heads around. But it is all about assuring us that Jesus’ arrival and presence in our world, demonstrates God’s love for us. In the Incarnation of Jesus, in the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, in the Ascension of Jesus, we are assured of God’s love for us.

Our Response to God’s Love

God’s love for us is not something that is supposed to go unrequited. Just like any other loving relationship we are called into, our loving relationship with God is one that calls us into the hope, peace and joy we have spoken about in the first three weeks of Advent.

Today we hear how Mary responded to God’s Love:-

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord: my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”

Mary’s response is whole hearted. Mary’s example of embracing God’s will is a stirring example for us. Just imagine, an unmarried teenage girl being pregnant in Jewish society 2000 years ago. It would have meant the height of shame and to be ostracized from her local community. And yet Mary embraced God’s love and God’s plan for her life.

As followers of Christ today, we are called to live out our lives like Mary.

We are to live this life together as the body of Christ, in the same plainness of humanity that was made Godly by Christ’s sharing it.

I believe that if we experience God's presence, like Mary did, then we too, will be filled with the desire to follow Jesus in our lives.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he says to them, "Christ, who is your life." So, in this we are to be like Mary. We are to be the bearers of the Christ—for our bodies are the only place where Jesus may live now on this earth.

We are the body of Christ—when we let Christ dwell within us.

And when we share Christ with others, God will always be with us. If we too embrace Christ in our lives, we, like Mary, will be blessed among all men and women.

By sharing Christ, we, like Mary, take part in the greatest, most wonderful thing the world has ever known.

Conclusion

Through Advent we have looked at the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. We understand these themes in the fulfillment of Jesus coming into the world, because God loves us.

As Christmas Day rapidly approaches, are we ready to receive the reality of God within us?

Are we ready to put the Christ within us to work?

Mary, the ordinary teenage girl was ready. How ready are we?

Amen.