

The Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
23-02-2025
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 45: 3-11, 15 Joseph reveals himself to his brothers

Psalms 37: 1-11, 40-41 God's Protection for those who trust him

1 Corinthians 15: 35-50 The Resurrection

Luke 6: 27-38 Love your Enemies

Introduction

Today as we hear the readings from scripture I would like us to think about two aspects that come from the readings.

Firstly, that God has been revealed to us.

And secondly, that through this revelation we are called to trust God.

God's Revelation

The whole of the scriptures themselves, are God's revelation of God, to us, and for us. We may come to know and experience God in many different ways, but for us as Christians, it is the Bible that explains God's revelation through history, culminating in the person of Jesus. The Bible reveals God's plan for the world from Creation to the New Creation, and the way to the New Creation is through Jesus.

In the Old Testament reading today, we hear an interesting story of the revelation of God's will through the life of Joseph. We hear the story of Joseph being revealed to his brothers. It's a significant part of the story of Israel. You may recall the story of Joseph, how his father loved him and gave him a coat of many colours. And how his brothers became jealous, and their anger was not helped by the way Joseph seemed arrogant and aloof. And so, they went to kill him, but instead sold him into slavery, and he faced many trials and tribulations. And how eventually he came to become the most trusted adviser to Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt.

In all this Joseph trusted God, and God put Joseph in exactly the right place, where he was able to save his family from starvation, when a famine came. Joseph trusted God, and God revealed the purposes God had for Joseph to him.

You may have had an insight to the nature of God, by some thing that has happened to you, or by witnessing the power or beauty of nature.

The ultimate revelation of God for us, is of course the person of Jesus. In our reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians today we hear how Paul is teaching them about the nature of the resurrection. Paul was able to give this teaching for them, and for us, firstly because the witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus had shared it with Paul, and secondly because Paul had trusted their witness after his own experience on the road to Damascus.

The experience of the resurrection, for the first disciples of Jesus and then for Paul who joined them, allowed them to trust Jesus implicitly.

God was revealed so powerfully in the person of Jesus, that those first followers of Jesus knew they were trusting God when they obeyed the teaching that Jesus had given them.

Trusting God

As followers of Jesus today, we know we can trust God. As those who have had a revelation of the resurrection and what it means for our lives, we can be assured that trusting God leads us to trust the teachings of Jesus, and to know that in seeking to obey them, we too are living into the very best God has planned for us.

Verses 3 to 5 of today's psalm tells us:-

³ Trust in the Lord and do good: and you shall dwell in the land and feed in safe pastures.

⁴ Let the Lord be your delight: and he will grant you your heart's desire.

⁵ Commit your way to the Lord: trust him, and he will act.

So, we know that we can trust what God has done for us in Jesus, and we know that as we trust God, we are called to follow the teachings of Jesus.

But although we know that we are ultimately secure in God's loving hands by trusting and following Jesus, it doesn't mean we won't face challenges in life.

In the life of Joseph, many very challenging things happened to him. He was hated by his brothers, he was sold into slavery, he was falsely accused and convicted, and yet through all this he trusted God, and God used him to provide for his family in their time of need.

In our reading from Luke's gospel today we have some very challenging teaching from Jesus. We are told to love our enemies. So, as those who know the revelation of God for us in Jesus, and those who trust God, we are

called to love our enemies. This is some very hard teaching from Jesus, but we know that Jesus' teaching is there for us to live our best lives.

So, let's look at the implications for us if we are to be able to "love our enemies".

Firstly, loving our enemies means that we will have enemies to love. When I hear the word "enemy", I think also of the word "war". And I don't think that I'm at war with anyone per say. It seems like such a strong word, but if we do anything in life, even with the best intentions there will often be people who disagree with us, or see things in a different way. And this can often lead to conflict. So, in this sense we will have enemies, no matter how hard we try to live lives following Jesus.

Recently retired Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has written and spoken significantly of the need for us, who call ourselves Christians, to forgive one another, and to learn how to disagree well. He says it is inevitable that we will have disagreements, and that we really need to work on how we continue to live with one another when we do disagree. He uses these words,

"Disagreement should be a matter of debate, of rational examination, of different views, even of passionate and robust argument. It should not be a cause of hatred, the incitement of violence, and the denigration of the humanity of the other person."

Secondly, what might loving our enemies, look like? It doesn't mean accepting injustice, or allowing evil to flourish, but it does mean treating others with decency and respect. We need to find ways to care for others even when we disagree with them. This can be a great challenge. It is hard, and if it requires forgiveness there may be other layers of challenges for us. Loving our enemies is not necessarily something that will come easily to us. It may be something we will need to take to God in prayer and continually work on throughout our lives. But it will be something that helps us to know peace in our lives, and to know and feel at peace with God.

There is an old saying that goes something like this, "Holding on to unforgiveness is like drinking a bottle of poison and waiting for something to happen to the other person. It may or may not do anything to them, but it is certainly no good for you."

Thirdly, how might loving our enemies fit in with God's plans for our world? It may demonstrate the love of God to others who have not yet come to know Jesus, and may help them in coming to faith. It may help as a good example for other followers of Jesus, and enable them to grow in their faith. And by loving our enemies, we have the possibility of turning them into friends.

Conclusion

Central to the Christian faith is that “God Loves us” and that God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus. Flowing from this is that God wants us to trust in God’s promises for us, and a specific aspect of trusting God from today’s Gospel is that we are called to love our enemies.

This may seem like a big challenge, loving those who oppose us is not natural, but it is more than worth it. Trusting Jesus, and following the teachings of Jesus, even the hard ones, enables us to live our best lives and to be at peace with God. Amen.