

Reflection - Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 16)

21-07-2024

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

2 Samuel 7:1-14a God doesn't want David to build a temple,
but promises to establish his kingdom through David.

Psalms 89:21-38 God will fulfill his promises to David.

Ephesians 2:11-22 Christians are brought to one in Christ

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 Jesus tries to get solitude with disciples.
He has compassion and teaches,
and heals all who touch Him.

Introduction

This morning, I would like to continue on from last week by focusing on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

We are in week two, of seven weeks where we will be hearing portions of Scripture from this letter. Paul had earlier established a Christian Community at Ephesus, and he was writing to give them a message of encouragement, and to strengthen the faith of the believers in the local churches.

In this letter, Paul's main aim is to teach the Ephesians the nature of who they are in Christ, and how they are called to live in unity, as the Church.

So let us explore this second part of chapter two, of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:11-13

We begin with verses eleven to thirteen:-

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Here Paul is making it very clear, that there are those who are born into the Jewish faith, of whom Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and those who are not. The Jews knew they were God's chosen people even though they didn't always act like it. The Ephesians on the other hand had been brought in to become God's people because of what Jesus had achieved.

This distinction might be something we can understand in a general sense, but I don't think we have a real feel for the enormity of it.

Hands up those who had Christian parents? We have in our society a cultural history of Christianity. The Ephesians had made a dramatic change to what they had decided to base their lives on, and Paul was writing to encourage them in the decision they had made.

He reminds them that before they were without Hope, but now through the blood of Jesus they have been brought into the presence of God.

Even though our society has a Christian heritage, it is also very quickly moving away from it. We need reminding just like the Ephesians did that we need to remain committed to Jesus to retain this hope that we have.

Because of the affluence of our society and the relatively good living standards, many of us have, we may not realize it, but there are many influences pulling people away from the Christian faith.

Just like the Ephesians had to be reminded that they needed to stay close to Jesus, we also need that reminder, even though we may have grown up knowing Jesus.

Ephesians 2:14-18

Now let's proceed to verses fourteen to eighteen:-

¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

In these words, we hear very clearly that Jesus came for all humanity. God's chosen people are no longer just the Jews, but all who come to Jesus.

I would like to share with you some words attributed to well known contemporary British /American Historian Niall Ferguson, who grew up in Scotland as an atheist, and considered himself an atheist for much of his life:-

In an interview in 2023, however, Ferguson declares: "I'm a lapsed atheist ... I go to church every Sunday, precisely because having been brought up an atheist, I came to realize in my career as a historian that not only is atheism a disastrous basis for society... but also because I don't think it can be a basis for individual ethical decision making".

Christianity should enable us as human beings to flourish.

Jesus came for all Humanity, that is why the church has always wanted to share the “Good News” of Jesus with those who have not yet heard about Jesus, and those who have not yet accepted the joy, forgiveness and peace that Jesus brings into our lives.

Jesus wasn't just a prophet who we might be able to pick up some good tips for living. Jesus is the way to life itself, as it's really meant to be.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians(3:28) he writes:-

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

As Christians we believe that Jesus is the great hope for all Humanity.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Now let's conclude with verses nineteen to twenty-two:-

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

From these verses we hear that Christianity is not an individual pursuit, but rather to become a Christian is to become part of something much bigger than ourselves.

It says we are “citizens with the saints, and also members of the household of God”.

As Christians we are connected, and we have an obligation to one another. I and connected to you and you are connected to me. We need to be there for one another. This can be hard, but it is how we are designed as human beings. We are social creatures. Being there for one another is how we best thrive in the world.

I read something recently about an article in the Journal “New Scientist”. It talked about how archeologists were trying to work out why homo sapiens are the only human species to have survived. The postured that around 200,000 years ago there at least five different types of humans on the planet.

There are many theories around brain power, or language, or even just good luck, but according to the latest archeological thinking, the answer is laden with irony: it is “our deepest vulnerabilities - being dependent on others, feeling compassion, and experiencing empathy – that could have given us the edge. They have theorized that because we cared more about one another we were able to work better together to overcome problems, and to thrive.

Paul is explaining in these verses that as Christians we are called to work together in unity, with God at the centre.

It's in our DNA, and yet we continually need to be reminded that we thrive best when we work together. We need to learn to be kinder to one another. We may not always agree, but we need to be honest, and we need to be kind, as we seek to live together in Christian community.

Conclusion

So, what will we take away with us from our exploration of Paul's letter to the Ephesians this morning.

Firstly, I hope we have been reminded that following Jesus is a choice that we make that brings God into our lives, and gives us Hope.

Secondly, that Christianity is the best Hope for all humanity.

And finally, that we are made to live in Christian community, and as we do this, we will seek to be kind to one another.

As we go out from worship today, may we be encouraged to be kind to one another. Amen.