

Reflection – Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 28)
13-10-2024

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Job 23: 1-9, 16-17 Job Questions God's apparent distance from Him.
- Psalms 22: 1-15 The Lord carries us from suffering to Joy.
- Hebrews 4: 12-16 Nothing is hidden from Jesus
Because of Jesus we can approach God with confidence
- Mark 10:17-31 Jesus speaks to the rich young man.
First will be last and the last will be first.

Introduction

As we reflect on today's bible readings, I would like to focus on the absolute hope and joy we are assured of as Christians.

You might be thinking did he actually read the readings we just heard.

We heard Job cry out to God, "Today also my complaint is bitter."
We heard in Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me: why are you so far from helping me and from the words of my groaning?"
We hear of the reaction of the rich young man after Jesus told him to sell all that he has, "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."

Where is the joy in all that, you might say. Granted there doesn't sound like a lot of joy in those sentences, but I want to look at the readings in their totality and see how they point to the absolute hope and joy we have as Christians.

Challenges

So, let's start by looking at some of the challenges we have heard in the bible readings today.

In our human lives we experience a full range of emotions and feelings, from joy and happiness through to melancholy, grief and even profound sadness.

This is very normal.

You only have to look at any news broadcast to see that we live in an imperfect world. Wars and Natural Disasters are constantly in the news.

It would seem to me to be very rare if someone was to live a full life and not face any challenges. The challenges and even persecutions we've heard about in today's readings, will be a part of our normal human existence, if we live for any length of time in this world.

In today's reading from Job, we hear that Job is suffering, and he doesn't know why, and he can't feel God's presence with him, yet we know that Job remains faithful to God.

In Psalm 22 we hear of suffering, and yet remaining faithful to God even in the face of persecution (Psalm 22:2-3):-

My God, I cry to you by day, but you do not answer:
and by night also I take no rest.
But you continue holy

In the reading from chapter four of Hebrews, we are told that we will need help in time of need, and we can get that help by approaching God with boldness.

In Marks Gospel we hear how the man with many possessions, who rejected Jesus, walked away grieving, and yet Jesus reassures his followers that if they remain faithful, they will receive back one hundredfold what it has cost them, and they will have eternal life.

So, we have looked at all the challenges posed in today's scripture readings, let us now see how we can have Hope and Joy.

Hope and Joy

Being a Christian does not stop the realities of this world that we live in happening, but it does give us the best tools possible to live through life. As Christians we are called to be people of Hope, and I believe, that it is in this Christian Hope, that we can have Joy. As I was reflecting on the readings, preparing for today I was drawn to another portion of scripture from Paul's letter to the Romans (5:1-5) :-

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Hope has a few definitions in the dictionary:-

- Expectation of something desired,
- Confidence in a future event
- To look forward to with desire and more or less confidence,
- To trust in the truth of a matter (with cause).

I really like the 4th one, to trust in the truth of a matter, with cause.

The cause of the matter of our hope as Christians is Jesus. Not the vague notion of a God out there somewhere, or an ideology, or a life choice that we have made because it seemed like a good thing at the time.

Rather as Christians we put our hope in Jesus. A real person, who met and interacted with real people, and drew real disciples to himself, in his lifetime.

Jesus went on to die, but he rose again from the dead, and although this was initially a terrifying experience for those first disciples, when they came to better understand what it meant, it gave them a hope, which they would not abandon, even in the face of death.

Christian hope is not a wishy-washy type of hope, but rather a hope grounded in human experience, a hope that has stood the test of time, a hope that has continued for 2000 years.

And what about definitions for Joy:-

- An emotion of keen or lively pleasure
- great gladness
- delight

Given what we looked at first, in terms of suffering, we know it is normal and natural for our emotions to go up and down. We live in an imperfect world. But if we do have Christian Hope, then I believe there is, despite life's many challenges, an underlying joy which will permeate our lives.

I do not think this is a fleeting joy. In fact, we are told to approach God with boldness. In the reading from Hebrews(4:16) today we hear:-

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The hope and joy we have as Christians is not timid or shy, but rather, hope and joy we should hold with boldness, enabling us to face life's challenges, and allowing us to show God's love to the world around us.

I was not with my father when he died, but my mother was, and she was reading the bible to him. I know that even as she faced this great challenge, of losing her husband of over 50 years, her Christian faith gave her hope.

Conclusion

Today we have explored Suffering, Hope and Joy.

Now suffering should not be something that we seek out. We should be seeking to live good lives, loving and caring for one another. But there will be times when suffering will come into our lives.

It is normal to face challenges in life, but I believe that Jesus provides us with a reason for hope, and gives our lives an underlying joy that can not be taken away from us.

As we go out from worship today. As we face life's challenges this week.

May we go out with Hope and Joy, seeking to follow Jesus in all that we do, knowing that Jesus promised his followers that they would receive back, now in this age one hundredfold, and in the age to come eternal life. Amen