

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 33)
17-11-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- 1 Samuel 1:4-20 Hannah prays and Samuel is born.
- Psalms – Song of Hannah Hannah praises God after the birth of her son – and acknowledges that all good comes from God.
- Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25 Because Jesus died he opened for us a new way so let us live faithfully gathering and encouraging one another.
- Mark 13: 1-11 Jesus tells about the future – Wars and Earthquakes: but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Introduction

Today I would like to look at three aspects of our Christian life that emerge from the Bible readings:-

- Persecution
- Perseverance, and
- Peace

Persecution

Firstly, let's look at Persecution. Do you consider that you will be persecuted for being a Christian? Jesus told his first disciples they would be persecuted. If we are followers of Jesus today, why should we be different to those first disciples?

Well for one the world is very different in many ways. In the western world Christianity became the dominant religion, and yet the nature of the society in which we live is rapidly changing. As Christians, we are likely to increasingly find ourselves at odds with the changing values and norms of the society around us. Christians have been persecuted for their faith down the ages, and around the world today, Christianity is the most persecuted religion.

We only need look at the literature from organizations like Open Doors or Barnabas Fund to see the extent around the world in which Christians are persecuted.

These are the words from our Gospel reading today, that Jesus shared with his first disciples:-

⁹“As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them.

The first disciples of Jesus faced great persecution, and yet through their faith they were given the ability to persevere and the peace to overcome.

We are extremely fortunate here in Australia, in general we are not persecuted, but as many in academia and society seek to change the basis of our society from “freedom of religion” to “freedom from religion”, it may be in the future that persecution will become more evident.

I saw evidence of this when I was on a committee supporting Chaplains in the State School System in Queensland. Anti-Christian campaigners challenged the Federal government funding which was greatly appreciated by the vast majority of Schools who had chaplains, and funding was disrupted.

As bearers of the Good News of Jesus, we need to be aware that we may face opposition and at times persecution because of our faith, and we need to be prepared to handle it.

Perseverance

As Christians though, we can rely on God to give us the ability to persevere.

If we surrender our lives to Jesus – then the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. We can know that God is not out there somewhere, but that God dwells within us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, in our first reading from chapter one of 1 Samuel and in the “Song of Hannah” from chapter two of 1 Samuel we hear of how Hannah persevered in prayer to God. Though she was in distress she didn’t waver from acknowledging the power and goodness of God.

In today’s reading from the letter to the Hebrews, we hear how they were encouraged to persevere, and show love and do good deeds for one another.

I recall ministering with one of the Sunday School Teachers in another Parish, and she was struggling with some issues, and in our discussion she said something to the effect of, “I know I can trust God to always be with me, but sometimes we need God with flesh on”. In other words, sometimes we are helped by God to persevere through our fellow Christians being there for us as we support one another. Sometimes it is we ourselves, who provide the hands and the feet and the ears, to help our fellow Christians know God’s presence in their lives.

Jesus told his disciples they would face great challenges, but not to worry about the words they would need because the Holy Spirit would give them the words they needed.

I don’t think perseverance in and of itself will be sufficient though, if doesn’t come from something to persevere for. In the Christian faith our perseverance comes out of the assurance of God’s love for us in Jesus.

We are saved by grace through faith. In the reading from the letter to Hebrews (10:14) today we hear these words :-

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified

God enables us to persevere in hope, when we place our trust in Jesus. The witness of the Bible gives us clear evidence that the first Christians expected to experience the power of God in their lives. And though they faced many challenges they were enabled to stand firm in their faith.

We experience the Love of God when we surrender our lives to Jesus. We will be enabled to persevere by God, if we continually turn to God.

Peace

If we continue to turn to God, if God is real for us, then we can know God's peace. God's peace will enable us to face persecution and to persevere.

In the scriptures today, we have heard examples of how others were enabled to trust God implicitly in their lives:-

We heard Hannah, not doubting but praying to God:-

"I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD." (1 Samuel 1:15)

In the letter to the Hebrews, we hear that Jesus is more than real:-

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

And in Mark's gospel, Jesus himself says to the disciples:-

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Mark 11:13)

God is not an abstract idea, but rather God is real and personal. We should expect to have a relationship with God. In the midst of life, we can have the assurance of knowing God's Peace.

One of the blessings set down in our liturgy, we ask for "the Peace of God, which passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, ...". Because of our limited capacity as mere human beings, we may never, in this world, fully understand the Peace of God, but we can have the assurance of knowing God's Peace in our lives, and of experiencing the hope we have because of it.

God's Peace gives us the assurance us of God's Love for us.

Conclusion

I hope I've been clear that it's not perseverance, in itself, that helps us, but rather the faith and the hope we have in Jesus, that will generate in us the will to keep going.

As we know and experience God's Peace, God gives us the ability to face challenges in life.

Sometimes in our Christian journey, life is not easy, yet it is through Jesus we have hope, and it is through Jesus we gain the strength to persevere.

I pray this week that:-

you will know and experience the presence of God through Jesus and through the love and support of fellow Christians,

that you will feel the Holy Spirit within you,

and that God will give each and every one of us the strength to persevere, in doing God's work, and in showing God's love, to build up God's Kingdom.

Amen.