

The First Sunday after Christmas
29-12-2024
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- 1 Samuel 2:18-20,26 Samuel grows in stature as he serves in the temple
- Psalms 148 Let all creation praise and worship the Lord.
- Colossians 3:12-17 As the Body of Christ, Christians should live loving and forgiving one another, and in everything give thanks.
- Luke 2: 41-52 As a young boy Jesus talks with the religious leaders in the temple

Introduction

Well, Christmas was just four days ago, but in our gospel reading today Jesus is twelve years old. Today we hear the only story of Jesus' childhood recorded in the Gospels. It's a story of Jesus growing up, learning about God.

Today in the sermon I'd like us to look at Growth, and Growing, and Change.

Jesus grew, from the small baby we celebrated the birth of on Wednesday, and we also should grow in our Journey of Faith with God. In the gospel reading we see how God the Father was always at the centre of Jesus' Journey. So, the Gospel should be central, to our lives, and shape, and mold, all that we do in our life's journey.

Growing - Children

Let's start by looking at the fact we grow as human beings.

We all grow throughout our lives. We all start out as babies and move on from there. The most significant growth occurs when we are children.

There are things that I learnt, both good and bad, from my parents and grandparents that have shaped my life to this day.

Today in the scriptures we have heard about the good growth of Samuel:-

²⁶Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the LORD and with the people.

And the good growth of Jesus:-

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

The best way to grow as Christians is to start when we are born. There is a great little church video called "Aim Lower" which says that you are most likely to become a Christian, and to remain a Christian throughout your life, if you make the decision to follow Jesus before you are twelve years old.

This of course does not stop anyone from becoming a Christian at any stage in their lives, however generally the older we become the more set in our ways we become.

So, it is very important to share our faith with the younger members of our families and our communities.

Children's ministries like Godly Play and religious education in schools, are vital ministries for the life of the church, if the church is to grow.

Growth means Change

And growth often means change.

People usually don't like it when they hear that something is going to change. Change can be an uncomfortable thing. But sometimes for growth to occur changes need to take place. The society around us is changing rapidly. The "Good News" of Jesus doesn't change, but sometimes the way we deliver this "Good News" has to change.

Even for things to stay the same, we need to put effort in.

A good example of this is the brick wall around our memorial garden in front of the church. I met the grandson of the parishioner who provided the funds for the wall to be built. I'm sure it was nice and white and shiny when it was built, and for it not to decay but just to stay the same, it needs to continually be painted.

So, we see from this example, that even for things to stay the same. effort needs to be put in. If things are to change and grow, even more effort may be required.

At one ministry conference I attended, there was a guest speaker, a recently retired Anglican Priest named Rod Irvine. He had previously been the Senior Minister at Fig Tree Anglican Church in Wollongong. During his time there, the Church saw amazing growth. He told us the growth was undergirded by prayer, but they were also relentless in finding new ways to share the Gospel, and finding the funding to provide extra staff each year, as the congregation grew. One of his lines was,

"We will do anything short of sin to win others for Christ."

What do we Grow into

In talking about growth a good question might be – What do we grow into? I think our Colossians reading from today gives us an excellent example of what we should aspire to grow into.

In this reading we hear about compassion, kindness, humility, meakness, patience, love and forgiveness. These are all easy words to say, it took me only a few seconds to say them all, but they take a lot of effort on our part, to live them out.

It doesn't matter how much we already know. It doesn't matter how much theology we learn. Unless we put our faith into action, in the way Paul is describing it to the Colossians, then our faith isn't being fulfilled, and we are unlikely to grow.

It is a big challenge for us to be growing in our love for one another. I was having a discussion with someone recently who wasn't a Christian, and he said he had met a lot of people who called themselves Christians, and yet were quite unethical. I sympathized with him, and tried to explain that's why the bible makes sense, because we are all sinners, whilst agreeing with him that their lives were not a great advertisement for Christianity. He also said he thought it would be a hard life to live as a Christian, as it would be demanding. I agreed with him that it could be difficult, but sought to assure him that the rewards far outweighed the challenges.

It's a big challenge for us to show the kind of love for one another that Paul writes to the Colossians about today. We all tend to want our own way, it's just our sinful human nature. But we are called to love one another, and as followers of Jesus it is part of who we are to continue to work at it throughout our life's journey.

And if we are growing in our love for one another, then that will be a witness to the world around us.

Conclusion

It's been a pretty broad talk today. We've talked about Children, We've talked about Growth and Growing and Change. We've looked at what we might change into.

My prayer today is that no matter how old we are now. Whether we're a baby or whether we're in our 90's, God will always be at the centre of our life's journey. And We will continue to grow more, and more like Jesus.

And that our Growth might be a visible sign of Jesus to others. Amen.