



Parramatta
Mission



uniting
church
in Australia
Synod of NSW & ACT

Lenten Devotions 2020

Week 4

Parramatta Mission

Uniting Church in Australia



Lent commenced on Ash Wednesday, 26th February, preparation the church for Easter. From Ash Wednesday to Easter is 40 days, not counting Sundays, and correlates with Jesus being in the wilderness for forty days after his baptism, tempted, yet found without sin. Christians the world over give attention during this time to their relationship with God, reflecting upon growth in faith, how the faith is expressed in relationship with others. This year the pastoral team are encouraging Lenten devotions through providing a daily set of Bible readings and reflections. A Bible reading is chosen for each day, and a member of the team will write a brief reflection for that day. You are encouraged to use these reflections as part of the daily devotions, using prayers of your choice. If you have other devotional material, you might like to either suspend, or augment that material with what is provided through the newsletter. The daily prayer guide from the Uniting Church is also included, for those who wish to take this up.

Reflections will be written by:

The Old Testament: Rev Dr Clive Pearson,

Psalm: Rev Dr Amelia Koh Butler,

Epistle: Rev Dr Manas Ghosh,

Gospel of John:

Rev Christine Bayless Kelly,

Gospel of Matthew: Rev Keith Hamilton

Monday, 16th March:2020

Samuel 16 : 1 - 13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ²Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'" ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

(NSRV)

REFLECTION

It is a time of change; it is a time of transition. The prophet Samuel is mourning for Saul's loss of favour. He is told to put aside his personal grief. He must act, in effect, in the interests of the people. The one whom had been chosen to be the king of Israel has been rejected by God. It is unclear what the future will bring. Samuel does not know what that future will be: his calling is to respond to the initiative of God in electing a new person to rule. The extent to which that favour is evident can be seen in the horn of oil with which Samuel will anoint the new king. Saul was anointed with oil from a glass vial – fragile and small; the one who will replace him will be anointed with oil from a horn – a larger and stronger vessel.

The pathway to this future is far from straightforward. Samuel begins through a time of grief; now he is concerned that Saul will hear of what will seem like an act of betrayal and have him killed. The shift in royal leadership is a fraught business. So many things could go wrong. So many messages might be misinterpreted. Samuel will need to proclaim that he comes in peace.

Samuel does not seek to speak ill of Saul. That is the perennial temptation when change occurs. That is not what happens here. Now is the time to discern who will be the new king, the new leader. There is no set of desirable attributes or competencies listed. There is no academic achievement. Saul has traveled to Bethlehem and we are told that the one to be king is one of the sons of Jesse. But it is not the oldest, nor the one with the finest stature; the criteria for this search is what is in the heart. Seven sons pass by and somehow Samuel knows that the Lord has not chosen any one of them.

There is one left: David, the youngest, is tending the sheep. So often in biblical narratives the youngest son or the seemingly least likely is preferred. We are not told what is the state of David's heart: all we know is that he was 'ruddy', 'handsome' and had 'beautiful eyes'. Those attributes are not the ones we are likely to privilege in an election campaign or the role of leader. David is chosen: because he is God's choice, the spirit of the Lord comes upon him.

The story begins with Samuel grieving for Saul; it ends with Saul departing for Ramah.

Prayer:

You look into our hearts, Lord God. You look behind and beneath our outward form. Who can stand tall before you? We depend upon your Spirit: might it be gracious to us and refine us in the ways you would have us be. Let your Spirit anoint our calling in you to be the body of Christ.

Clive Pearson

Tuesday 17th March 2020

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

REFLECTION

Such a spiritually significant song for so many of us,
but with so many practical hints for daily discipleship activity...

ACTS OF PRAYER

Lie down on the grass.

Walk by the water.

Take the paths on your wandering.

Come to God's table.

Be anointed with oil. (Use olive oil if you don't have anything else.)

Abide in God and let God abide in you.

Amelia Koh Butler

Wednesday 18th March 2020

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Reflection

As we enter the fourth week of our Lenten journey we hear Paul’s instruction “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1). By imitating Christ we receive a new identity – “children of light” and by the exposure of our “Christ-enlightened” life we bring others to the source of this light – Christ Jesus and thus illuminate the world.

Manas Ghosh

Thursday 19th March 2020

John 9 : 1-20 Healing and Hope

⁹As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;

Reflection

One thing we can learn from Jesus is the opportunity to bring hope to people. In this story of healing great hope is given to the man born blind- and the opportunity to see for the very first time. Jesus heals him in a very crude way- spitting in the soil and making mud which was placed on the man's eyes- then he could see! Spit is something which is considered offensive, yet it is through our saliva that our DNA can be taken. DNA is the key to the foundations of our very cells - and our very life. There are echoes of the creation of Adam - made from the dirt. Through Jesus very life this man was healed and able to see.

Christine Bayliss-Kelly

Thursday 20th March 2020

John 9: 21 – 41—Heritage and Hope

²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. ³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” ³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Reflection

The man born blind was seen as a punishment for what his parents had done. We know it is not always the case but the heritage of our family impacts upon us as well. Many of our biases, judgements and the way we view the world come from our family of origin. These can be good but can also be a problem. Yet we are part of another family- our spiritual family and Jesus claims us as his own. Maybe we need our eyes opened as well- to our values, judgements and prejudices which prevent us from seeing ‘sisters and brothers’ in new ways - with Grace, Inclusion, offering dignity, through our faith and hope just as Jesus did.

Christine Bayliss-Kelly

Saturday 21st March 2020

Matthew 7: 1-8

1 Judge not that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way that you judge you will be judged, and in the way that you measure you will be measured. 3 Why do you look at a speck in another's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye. 4 Or how can you offer to take the speck out of another's eye, and look, the beam is in your eye. 5 You hypocrite, first take the beam out of your eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of another's eye. 6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs, and do not cast pearls before swine or they will trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. 7 Ask and it will be give to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks, receives, and everyone who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it shall be opened. (Translation by Keith Hamilton)

REFLECTION

Everyday we make valuations and decisions. We make judgements. Currently we are all evaluating how best to manage our safety with the COVID-19. As we acquire information, we make a judgement and a decision. We do this all the time. Will we buy this product or that product? How much toilet paper do we need? Will we buy from this retailer or that retailer? We might even decide we love a certain food and hate another. We like to be with this person and not with that person. At what point are we judging the value or the inherent worth of the person? If we are all equal under the law and equal under God, then to make a judgement of a person as to their inherent worth, whether they are "a waste of space" or more important than all else, is to set ourselves apart from the rest and take on the role of God.

Keith Hamilton

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Matthew 7:7-12

⁷ “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! ¹² “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (NRSV)

REFLECTION

The Sermon on the Mount speaks of the virtues and practices that express faith in God and love of neighbour. The sermon begins with a call to humility - “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3) – that places trust in God and is open to God to work in the lives of people around us and in the world. These virtues are the practices of a grace-filled life. The teaching above is in the form of a parable. Ask, search, knock (vs 8) to find God. Verse 12 has the golden rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” A useful way to think about how we treat others. Not that we treat others well so that they might treat us well, but that we treat others the way we wish to be treated, with respect, dignity and inclusion.

Keith Hamilton

