

The Grace of Welcome

The other day one of my children asked me a question. It was about whether I was the kind of person I am because I was a Christian- or would I be like this even if I wasn't a Christian. It was a really interesting conversation and it got me thinking.

For people who have not been a part of the church, do they understand the way we speak and act to be because of who we are or do they expect things from us because we are Christians? Perhaps it is a bit of both.

Maybe the question needs to be more focused on what people see and experience of God through how we live our lives, and what we say. It is never just one nor the other- it is word and deed.

When we have Bible Study on Mondays we often think through the 4 bible passages set for the week and wonder what they might say to us. This week there were 4 readings that seemed to connect quite well but the two we have just heard seem to remind us of the sometimes bitter-sweet life we can have as we follow God through Jesus.

Psalm 13 is a really interesting psalm as it begins in a place of despair. The words speak of the darkest of places, where the writer feels desolate and abandoned. However, in a few short verses the writer moves from pleading to God to a place of trust. And alongside the trust there is a sense of rejoicing. From a place of despair to a place of praise in just a few verses may seem too good to be true. Yet I recall a time when I had received some very bad news. I was on the other side of the world- far away from family and friends. I can remember driving along calling out to God in frustration and pain, yet somehow the words turned to praise.

You see to have a close relationship with God means being able to come to God no matter what is happening in our lives. God takes us and holds us until we are in a better place. And that comes about because of the grace that only God can reveal.

You see grace is the unconditional mercy God has shown us in Jesus Christ. We don't deserve it but God sees us somewhat differently to the way we see ourselves- or even how we see others.



I have said before but there is something I learned about many years ago from an article on Mother Teresa who spoke of seeing Jesus in every person she dealt with. It challenged me to think about how we can see people- even those who might seem very different to ourselves.

Perhaps that is something gets picked up in the reading from Matthew. This section continues the collection of sayings from Jesus and follows on from the strange reading from last week where Jesus spoke of the conflict between family members. Today he speaks of loving Jesus more than or mother or father, or even our life itself. Perhaps it is a reminder that when we love people we are talking about this earthly life, yet in Jesus we encounter both the earthly AND the heavenly realm. To Love Jesus is more than just the feelings- it includes the way we act. It is picked up in the image of picking up our

cross and carrying it.

Yet the image which speaks so much to our context is the small section ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Here the words 'little ones' is not just about children- but it is about anyone who is vulnerable. Within our congregation we have many little ones- yet we are also called to serve many other little ones from the wider community.

In the last few weeks we have been reminded of a number of situations in the world. The Black Lives Matter movement reminds us of how we as a society have NOT always acted in ways of welcome and acceptance. The week of reconciliation 3 weeks ago speaks about the need to continue to work towards better relationships with our aboriginal brothers and sisters. Refugee Sunday last week reminds us of the inhumane way we still incarcerate asylum seekers and others in detention centres- for years at a time. There is no welcome in such behaviour. And there is no offering of a cup of water when we as a nation act in such ways.

Yet these readings bring us to a place of trust. A place where we can think of what it means to be righteous. Such a place is about right standing with God and with each other. And such a place- is a place of grace.

And so we come full circle. We are who we are because of our personalities, yet there has to be something of change in our lives as we continue to follow Jesus and grow in our discipleship. We offer ourselves to God, trusting that God will take who we are and transform us- and through us, others will hopefully experience something more of God. Perhaps this is Grace from God, that helps us to welcome others.

