



SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Our passage from the Acts of the Apostles shows us that Paul was well-prepared to speak to this group of people. As we know, he came from Tarsus, an educational centre; and had the training and knowledge to present his beliefs clearly and persuasively. Paul was a rabbi, taught by the finest scholar of his day, Gamaliel; and he had spent much of his life thinking and reasoning through the Scriptures. It is not enough to teach or preach with conviction. Like Paul, we must be prepared. The more we know about the Bible, what it means, and how to apply it to life, the more convincing our words will be. This doesn't mean that we should avoid presenting the gospel until we feel adequately prepared. We should work with what we know; but we should always want to know more in order to reach more people and answer

their questions and arguments more effectively. Paul's address is a great example of how to communicate the gospel. He didn't begin by reciting Jewish history – as he usually did – for this would have been meaningless to his Greek audience. He began by building his case for the one true GOD – using examples they understood. His audience – in Athens – had built an idol to an unknown god for fear of missing out on blessings or of receiving punishment. His opening statement to his audience was about their unknown god – not endorsing it but using the inscription as a point of entry for his witness to the One True GOD. Then he established common ground by emphasising what they agreed on about GOD. Finally, he moved his message to the person of CHRIST, centring on the resurrection. When we witness to others, we can follow Paul's approach: Use examples, establish common ground, and then move people toward a decision about JESUS.

Paul explained the one true GOD to these educated men of Athens; although they were, in general, deeply

religious, they did not know GOD. Today, we have a “CHRISTIAN” society; but to most people, GOD is still unknown. We need to proclaim who He is and make it clear what He did for all mankind through His Son JESUS CHRIST. We cannot assume that even religious people around us truly know JESUS or understand the importance of faith in Him. Paul didn’t leave his message unfinished though. He confronted his listeners with JESUS’ resurrection and its meaning to all people – either blessing or punishment. The Greeks had no concept of judgement. Most of them preferred worshipping many gods instead of just one, and the concept of resurrection was unbelievable and offensive to them. Paul didn’t hold back the truth, however, no matter what people thought. He often changed his approach to fit his audience, but he never changed his basic message.

Our psalmist was remembering GOD’s rescue of the Israelites by parting the Red Sea during the exodus. GOD saved the Israelites then and continues to save His

people today. Just as fire refines silver in the smelting process, trials refine our character. They bring us new and deeper wisdom – helping us discern truth from falsehood and giving us the discipline to do what we know is right. Above all, these trials help us realise that life is a gift from GOD to be cherished, not a right to be taken for granted. If we promise GOD something, we **MUST ALWAYS** follow through on it.

^The Apostle Peter lists 5 key elements that together should effectively characterise any group of believers:

1. Harmony – pursuing the same goals
2. Sympathy – being responsive to others' needs
3. Love – seeing and treating each other as brothers and sisters
4. Compassion – being affectionately sensitive and caring
5. Humility – being willing to encourage one another and rejoice in each other's successes

In order to answer questions like “How do we know GOD is real?” and “Who says the Bible is better than other holy

books?”, GOD sent His Son, JESUS CHRIST, as living evidence. GOD also chose Peter and others to show what a difference true faith makes in the real world. So here the once rash, belligerent, domineering, and arrogant Peter bears witness to a life of harmony, sympathy, love, compassion, and humility. What a difference GOD makes! We, too, are GOD’s witnesses to sceptical people. Our lives must be evidence of GOD’s truth. We must allow our pride to become humility and our insensitivity to give way to genuine affection for others.

In our fallen world, it is often deemed acceptable by some to tear people down verbally or to get back at them if we feel hurt. Peter, remembering JESUS’ teaching to turn the other cheek¹ encourages his readers to pay back wrongs by praying for the offenders. In GOD’s kingdom, revenge is unacceptable behaviour – as is insulting a person, no matter how indirectly it is done. Rise above

¹¹ Matthew 5:39

getting back at those who hurt you. Instead of reacting angrily to these people, pray for them.

^Verse 15 of this passage says: ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you. Some Christians believe that faith is a personal matter that we should keep to ourselves. It is true that we shouldn't be obnoxious or boisterous in sharing our faith – but we should always be ready to give an answer – gently and respectfully – when asked about our faith, our lifestyle, or our Christian perspective. Can others see our hope in CHRIST? Are we prepared to tell others what CHRIST has done in our lives? ^This part of our faith is called APOLOGETICS. Apologetics is defined as “reasoned arguments or writings in justification of something, typically a theory or religious doctrine.” So, it follows that Christian Apologetics defends Christianity. People such as GK Chesterton, CS Lewis, Lee Strobel and Ravi Zacharias are described as Christian apologists when the term is typed into a search

engine on the internet. For example, when Lee Strobel – a hard-nosed investigative journalist at the Chicago Tribune – when his wife started going to Church and became a Christian, he was determined to prove her wrong. But GOD had other ideas! In Strobel's book – The Case For CHRIST – he describes how he used all of his investigative journalistic prowess to prove her wrong and GOD showed him that He not only existed but that He changed Strobel's life into what it is today – a very committed Christian who shares his faith with as many people he can. As long as we do what is right, any accusations laid against us will be empty and will only embarrass the accusers.

Peter concludes this part of his letter with a description of Noah's salvation through water – symbolising baptism. In baptism, we identify with JESUS who separates us from the lost and gives us new life. It is not the ceremony that saves us; instead, the ceremony is evidence of our faith in CHRIST's death and resurrection. Baptism is the

symbol of the cleansing that happens in the hearts of those who believe.

In our Gospel passage today, JESUS promises to send us the Holy Spirit to live within us forever.

JESUS was soon going to leave the disciples; but He would remain with them. How could this be? The Advocate – the Spirit of GOD Himself – would come after JESUS was gone – to care for and guide the disciples. The regenerating power of the Spirit came on the disciples just before JESUS' ascension² and the Spirit was poured out on all believers at Pentecost³, shortly after JESUS ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of GOD within us and all believers, helping us to live as GOD wants and building CHRIST's church on earth. By faith we can appropriate the Spirit's power each day.

The word translated as ADVOCATE combines the ideas of comfort and counsel – so the Holy Spirit is a powerful person to have on our side – working for and with us.

² John 20:22

³ Acts 2

GOD has chosen not to give us knowledge of the future – but He tells us all we need to know to prepare for it. When we live by His standards, He will not leave us – He will come to us, He will be in us and He will show Himself to us. GOD knows what will happen and, because He will be with us through it all, we have no need to fear. Our faith in GOD gives us all the security we need for the future.



The Apostle Paul was a well-educated Jewish man who was very able to preach and teach about his faith. JESUS chose Him to take His Gospel message to the non-Jews – the Gentiles – which He did very ably and successfully. Similarly, Peter, an immensely proud Jew, shared his Christian faith with not only his fellow Jews but also with the Gentiles – which aroused some ill feelings from his Jewish colleagues. Before ascending into heaven, JESUS gave us the Great Commission to share our faith with others, make disciples of them and to baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ^Peter reminds us that we need

to: ¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Fr Michael Goonan, a priest with the Society of St Paul in Sydney, reflects on these passages as follows: “As we give thanks for the Holy Spirit who is our Advocate, we recognise that we in turn are called to be advocates for those people in our community who cannot speak for themselves. There are many organisations, often inspired by the Gospels, that are involved in advocacy – for refugees, for women and children in abusive relationships, for the mentally ill, the unborn and the aged who are unable to plead their own cause. And as St Peter reminds us in the reading from his letter, we are also called to be advocates for CHRIST by having an answer ready for people who ask us the reason for the hope we have. Let us remember that it is always the witness of our lives and our own personal stories – rather

than complex theological doctrines – that attract people to CHRIST.



May we pray:

In your great love, O GOD, you have gathered the people of the world as a parent embraces a child with loving kindness. Grant to us, Your children, an even deeper fidelity to your commands that we might live with a spirit of reverence for all the brothers and sisters of our LORD JESUS CHRIST – who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

Daily Prayer 2020

GOD's WORD Daily Reflections 2020