



THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Third Sunday After Pentecost

June 21, 2020

Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Pray

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



In the passage from Genesis, we read about Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. Ishmael became ruler of a large tribe or nation – as GOD promised his mother, Hagar. The Ishmaelites were nomads living in the Desert of Sinai and Paran, south of Israel. One of Ishmael’s daughters married Esau, Jacob’s (Israel’s) brother, Ishmael’s nephew. The Bible pictures the Ishmaelites as hostile to Israel and to GOD.

Our psalmist reminds us that sometimes our trouble or pain is so great that all we can do is cry out to GOD, “Guard my life”¹. And often, when there is no relief in sight, all we can do is acknowledge the greatness of GOD and wait for better times ahead. The conviction

¹ Psalm 86:2

that GOD answers prayer will sustain us in such difficult times.

“There is none like you, LORD”. The GOD of the Bible is unique! He is alive and able to do mighty deeds for those who love Him. All human-created deities are powerless because they are merely inventions of the mind – NOT living beings. The LORD alone is “worthy ... to receive glory and honour and power². Although people believe in many gods, we need never fear that the true GOD – the GOD we worship – is the true and only GOD.

It is also right to pray for a sign of GOD’s goodness. As David found, it may be just what we need. But let us not overlook the signs He has already given: the support of family and friends, the fellowship of other Christians, the light of each new day. And we can be confident that He knows our situation no matter how desperate it becomes – AND HE CARES!

² Revelation 4:11

Our passage from Paul's letter to the Romans begins a bloc of 3 chapters that deals with sanctification – or the change GOD makes in our lives as we grow in the faith. Chapter 6 explains that as believers, we are free of sin's control. Chapter 7 discusses the continuing struggle believers have with sin; and chapter 8 describes how we can have victory over sin.

Paul starts out by asking that if GOD loves to forgive, why don't we give Him more to forgive? If forgiveness is guaranteed, do we have the freedom to sin as much as we want? Paul's forceful answer is: BY NO MEANS! Such an attitude – deciding ahead of time to take advantage of GOD – shows that a person does not understand the seriousness of sin. GOD's forgiveness does not make sin less serious. His Son's death for sin shows us the dreadful seriousness of sin. JESUS paid with His life so that we could be forgiven. The availability of GOD's mercy MUST NOT become an excuse for careless living and moral laxness.

In the Church of Paul's day, immersion was the usual form of baptism – that is, new Christians were completely “buried” in water. They understood this form of baptism to symbolise the death and burial of the old way of life. Coming up out of the water symbolised resurrection to new life with CHRIST. If we think of our old, sinful life as dead and buried, we have a powerful motive to resist sin. We can consciously choose to treat the desires and temptations of the old nature as if they were dead. Then we continue to enjoy our wonderful new life with JESUS³.

We can enjoy our new life in CHRIST because we are united with Him in His death and resurrection. Our evil desires, our bondage to sin, and our love of sin died with Him. Now, united by faith with Him in His resurrection life, we have unbroken fellowship with GOD and freedom from sin's hold on us⁴.

The power and penalty of sin died with CHRIST on the cross. Our “old self”, our sinful nature, died once and

³ Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12 & 3:1-4

⁴ Ephesians 4:21-24; Colossians 3:3-15

for all, so we are freed from its power. The “body ruled by sin” is not the human body; but our rebellious sin-loving nature inherited from Adam. Though our body willingly cooperates with our sinful nature, we must not regard the body as evil. It is the sin in us that is evil. And it is the power of sin at work in our body that is defeated. Paul has already stated that through faith in CHRIST we stand acquitted – NOT GUILTY – before GOD. Here, Paul emphasises that we need no longer need live under sin’s power. GOD does not take us out of the world or make us robots – we still feel like sinning; and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we were saved, we were slaves to our sinful nature; but now we can choose to live for CHRIST⁵. Because of CHRIST’s death and resurrection, His followers need never fear death. That assurance frees us to enjoy fellowship with Him and to do His will. This will affect all our activities – when we know we don’t

⁵ Galatians 2:20

have to fear death, we will experience a new vigour in life.

Finally, Paul tells us to “count yourselves dead to sin”. This means that we should regard our old sinful nature as dead and unresponsive to sin. Because of our union and identification with JESUS, we are no longer obligated to carry out those old desires, motives, and goals – giving us the freedom to consider ourselves to be the people GOD has made us to be. We have a new start – and the Holy Spirit will help us become in our daily experience that person.

Our Gospel today contains much. The Reverend Canon Dr Angus Ritchie is a director of the Centre for Theology and Community in East London. He says, in writing for the Church Times in England, of our Gospel today: Jesus declares that he comes to bring not “peace to the earth”, but “a sword”. Yet, only a few verses earlier – in verses 12 & 13, he tells his disciples to pronounce a greeting of peace on each house they enter. St John Chrysostom explains this apparent contradiction,

observing that true peace comes only when sin is confronted: “This more than anything else is peace: when the disease of sin is removed. . . Only with such radical surgery is it possible for heaven to be reunited with earth.”

This searing process of transformation and purification, of being “put to death and brought to life again”, is described by Paul in our second reading. The apostle is addressing the spiritual complacency that comes when we take for granted the grace of God and thereby underestimate the gravity, the seriousness, of sin. God’s grace is, indeed, freely offered to all: it is not something we receive as a reward for virtuous living. But the act of receiving divine grace is incompatible with continuing collusion with sin.

This has a particular relevance as we consider our complicity (strong word) in social, economic, and racial **injustice**. Paul is warning us away from two spiritual temptations: the complacency that relies on our forgiveness in Christ as an excuse for failing to confront

wrongdoing, and also our anxiousness that is about self-justification rather than love. Both complacency and anxious self-justification are aiming for an illusory or temporary peace, in which we can say we are beyond reproach. In fact, genuine growth in holiness leads to a deeper sense of sorrow for our sin, and a stronger desire to be transformed.

Ida B. Wells (a central figure in the anti-lynching crusade in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) condemned the false gospel of white Christians who remained silent in the face of injustice. She declared that “our nation cannot profess Christianity” if it denied freedom — and even life itself — to black Americans.

Wells’ words echo down the generations, and across the nations; for they bear witness to the words of Christ in our Gospel reading, in his rejection of a false peace in favour of the interior and social conflict involved in confronting sin. There is an inner disturbance because we must face up to our own entanglement in sin. And

there is a social disturbance because, as Jesus explains, an honest reckoning with sin will divide families and communities.

Every second Thursday, I have the privilege of being involved – almost as like a chaplain – with a Christian Alcoholics Anonymous Group. We are working through a course called Celebrate Recovery. I am inspired by the way the members of this group have confronted their addictions and are moving forward in their lives to overcome it. The struggle is real – but to hear them share with our group – which is meeting over Zoom at the moment – that they are dry, that they are doing this through the strength of JESUS CHRIST, and that it is only through Him that they are overcoming their past, gives them a newly-found boldness in sharing their Christian faith – and is magnificent.

Our Zoom Bible Study group is looking at how we can more easily share our faith. Here is a video we will be discussing at our meeting next Wednesday:

[Show video]

It's pretty simple really – isn't it all about inviting someone to come to Church? In the first chapter of John's gospel, Philip saw his friend Nathanael and told him about JESUS. Nathanael replied: "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied – "come and see" – make up your own mind, but here is an opportunity for you to do it.

Interwoven into Jesus's teaching on the cost of faithful witness is that while the Father's care will not render the disciples immune to suffering, Jesus promises that those who lose their lives for his sake will receive eternal life — the true and lasting peace that flows from his paschal – resurrection – triumph.



So, throughout His preaching, JESUS leaves His disciples in no doubt that the mission He has entrusted to them – and us – is a daunting undertaking in the exercise of which they will face opposition, persecution, and even death. In today's gospel, Matthew records JESUS' instructions on how they are to behave in carrying out this mission. He repeatedly tells them that,

in witnessing to the truth, they must not succumb to the fear that paralyses. GOD will be with us always – an assurance that echoes the LORD’s comforting words to their suffering forebears during their exile in Babylon⁶. GOD will be with us too in all the events of daily life. I once heard a saying from Lee Strobel – influential American theologian and author: I don’t know what the future holds; but I know who holds the future.



May we pray:

O GOD, eternal Father, you have always given courage and strength to those who are fearful and who never turned away from your mercy. May we never forget your kindness and the unconditional love you have bestowed upon us through Your Son our LORD JESUS CHRIST.
Amen

⁶ Isaiah 43:5

Life Application Study Bible

Daily Prayer 2020

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/19-june/faith/sunday-s-readings/2nd-sunday-after-trinity>

Date accessed 20 June 2020

God's Word 2020