

Lent 5 – 9am Wesley – 25th March 2012 - DT

Theme: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.” Jeremiah 31:33b

Introduction

We have become a litigious society. For many people, if they feel wronged or have had an accident then the natural thing to do is to sue over the perceived or actual incident. The law has become the arbitrator not only in criminal matters but also in personal and marital things as well as work place issues. In a sense, the morals of our society are being judged in the courts. This is amazing because the courts are not really ‘set-up’ for such matters. The domestic life of the wealthy are now on display, so to speak, through court action. We only need to read the newspapers to see some of that occurring.

It is fascinating because both in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament we see this ‘legalism of the law’ versus the ‘spirit of the law’ being part of the discussions of the prophets and then of Jesus.

Encountering the Scriptures

A couple of Sundays ago, we meditated upon the Ten Commandments. Today’s reading from Jeremiah gives us opportunity to reflect upon the prophetic promise that one day God’s law will be written upon our hearts.

Jeremiah’s images are amazingly intimate. Many think of God as being distant, aloof, or simply far removed from us. But in this passage Jeremiah calls God a loving, resourceful parent.

Jeremiah speaks of a ‘new covenant’ that will be totally different from the ‘old covenant’ given to Moses on the mountain. These laws, written on the stone tablets, were repeatedly broken by God’s people. However Jeremiah speaks of a covenant where ‘the law will be put in people’s minds and it will be written on their hearts’.

What a different imagery to that of being told to keep the written law!

This prophecy was written in the most difficult of times for the Hebrew people. The walls of Jerusalem lay in ruins. The southern Kingdom of Judah was caught between the power plays of Egypt and the Babylonians which resulted in its destruction and many of its inhabitants being carried off into exile. There seemed like no hope for this once proud people.

For many, their faith was a thing of the past as their God had seemingly failed them. It is into this situation that Jeremiah shares a word of hope for the future. The people of faith hear a vision of hope about a God who graciously refuses to hold onto wrongs of the past and forgives a lack of obedience.

‘I will be their God and they will be my people’ says Jeremiah in 31:33c.

‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’, such is the graciousness of their God.

Hope in a seeming less hopeless situation – this is the word that the prophet Jeremiah brings to the people.

Why centre on this in Lent?

There are those in all denominations who see 'doom and gloom' for western Christendom. Some aspects are challenging but we need to look to God and God's word for direction. Jesus was not a 'letter of the law' person but rather 'the spirit of the law'. Jesus was not a legalist but one who offered hope, forgiveness and a fresh beginning for those who sought to follow God's ways.

For a moment think about yourself and the way you operate in life!

When do you stick to the letter of the law?

When do you allow the law to be in your mind and written on your heart?

How do we allow ourselves to better operate out of grace rather than law?

Where does the Holy Spirit come into all of this?

Take a few minutes to think upon these questions.

If you are able share with those close by

(give a few minutes and take any feedback)

Not easy questions but ones for us to reflect upon in this Lenten season.

Virtues

Some of us have been looking at a Lenten Study called "Four Cardinal Virtues" by the Rev Dr Ian Price.

Ian describes virtues as 'moral or ethical standards that shape or enable one to live life to the full'.

Ian follows this up with the thought 'to speak of cardinal virtues is to speak of moral foundations upon which all other ethics depend'. During the studies he looks at four virtues:

Prudence – to exercise prudence is to gather all the information one has at hand and to determine a course of action that will be moral and fair.

Justice – this is considered to be a habit or practice which seeks to render every person their rightful due.

Temperance – this is seen as self-control, the ability to maintain dignity and especially master pleasures that could lead to addictive behaviour.

Courage – this can be physical and/or moral and/or spiritual.

Courage can be seen as firmness, constancy and consistency in the pursuit of good both for self and others.

As I thought about these cardinal virtues I see them as an outworking of the 'new covenant' in our lives where God 'will put the law in our minds and will write the law upon our hearts'.

Therefore our thoughts, actions and words will reflect our God given faith. What a world we would have if we accepted and lived out our lives that way.

Praise be to God for the challenge of the Word of Scripyure for us this day. Amen.