

Epiphany 4 – Wesley 9am & 10.30am Services – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016

Theme: “Faith, hope & love”

Readings: Luke 4:21-30 & 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Text: “And now three things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Introduction

Today our readings are both about conflict, or at least that is the setting into which they come. The Gospel has the obvious air of conflict over what Jesus says in the synagogue in Nazareth that so upsets the locals that they want to kill him there and then, right at the outset of his ministry. We need to understand this resentment of Jesus in the context of the preceding verses where Jesus reads from the scroll handed to him the section of Isaiah 4:17, beginning with: “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me....” and he goes on to say, “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (vs 21)

It is this that illicit the wrath of the local community against him as they see simply the boy, now a man who has grown up in their community, now aligning himself with the prophets of old and they not recognizing one of their own as not only in the line of the prophets but the messianic implications that he brings.

In this stunning moment of re-interpretation, an ancient and well respected passage has just been turned upside down. Jesus announces that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor. No longer do they have to wait. His message will bring much needed healing among the people. In addition, Jesus has come to bring forgiveness, to release those who have been imprisoned. To those eyes who have been blinded to the reality of God in their midst, Jesus will provide sight. Finally, Jesus has come to announce the year of forgiveness, the acceptable year. Jesus announces that his ministry will be like the year of jubilee. Every fifty years the fields were rested and were re-invigorated for future harvests. In this jubilee year debts amongst the Jews were forgiven. Slaves were set free. Some scholars speculate that the very year Jesus appears in the Nazareth synagogue may well have been a jubilee year around 26-27 CE. Hence here is the hometown boy telling the people that they are part of the Jewish nation that rejected God’s messengers and God will use Gentiles as He did in the past. This goes down like the proverbial ‘lead balloon’ and the people become irate and threaten to kill Jesus.

Jesus states that ‘no prophet is accepted in his hometown’ vs 24

A less than successful start to his ministry here in his home town!

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Our Epistle appears on the surface to be a passage on the beauty of love based on the love of God for us, through Christ our Lord. This is indeed true but it is also part of a letter to the church in Corinth, written by the Apostle Paul, in an attempt to address some of the conflicts that this emerging Christian community were having and to offer them guidance and pastoral care. There were divisions over who followed who. Some followed the teachings of Apollos, some followed Paul. Some put a priority on certain spiritual gifts over and above others while others had internal lawsuits against each other. Others argued whether or not to eat meat that had been offered sacrificially to idols.

These are simply some of the arguments in preceding chapters of 1 Corinthians that Paul addresses. Just prior to this chapter on love he says to the Corinthian Christians:

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it.....And now I will show you the most excellent way.”

What follows is this wonderful passage on Christian love, based on the love of God in and through Christ Jesus for us. However this passage comes after much heartache over the fights occurring in that local community of faith.

Basically Paul is chastising the community for their lack of love and pastoral care, one for another, because they do not understand and have not internalised the living out of God's love in all they say and do.

Particularly we have these incredible verses, often used at weddings, in the middle section of today's reading:

“Love is patient, love is kind, It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” Vss4-7a

While it is not wrong to use these verses at weddings we need to remember the context of them – they are reminding the people in Corinth to remember God's love in all their dealings with each other and not to bicker and fight over trivial matters but to live out God's love for each other as part of their belief in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

This is the pastoral nature of Paul speaking to the church in Corinth. Just maybe there is something here for the church at Wesley to listen to as well. I don't want to be thrown off a cliff as almost happened to Jesus in the Gospel for today, but where we have our differences with others, our differences of the past, our differences in our worshipping groups may we be reminded of the over-riding love of God for each and everyone of us and may we find it in our hearts to forgive anything of the past, present or even the future that may tear apart our Christian relationships.

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. And the Greatest of these is love.”

May this be our defining principle.

Let us pray:

God of infinite, unending love, deliver us from the unloveliness of our age. Empower us to love as deeply, as broadly, as fully and as completely as you love us. When we encounter other people's shortcomings and failures, endow us with a spirit of compassion and patience. When we meet those whose perspectives or lifestyle is radically different from our own, enable us to see the limitations and the inadequacies in our own lives, in order to better appreciate their lives. When other people disappoint us, remind us of all the ways in which we disappointed you by what we have said and done, that we might throw a mantle of charity over the weakness of others.

Loving God, we would not know what love is, had we not been the recipients of your love. Because your love has flooded into our lives, redeeming us, sustaining us, we are able to love. We love because you first loved us. For your never-ending, ever-forbearing love, we give thanks. Amen