

Sermon for Cathedral 11.9.16

I would like to begin my sermon by offering thanks.

Firstly to God in gratitude for this beautiful sacred place and for this worshipping community, and also to Rev'd Rodney and the Cathedral members for the gracious hospitality that you have extended to us from Grovely parish.

As you know pilgrimage to our cathedral has become a biennial event for our parish family and you might say that we follow the tradition of the days of old when outlying parishes would set out on a pilgrimage, usually by horse and buggy or on foot to visit the mother church.

In the context of worship some things never change, in the context of transport thankfully they do and have.

Pilgrimage itself is an interesting phenomenon.

It may be defined as a journey to a sacred center or shrine.

The place or shrine typically is associated with an event or a saint that is perceived to have a connection with the divine and possesses spiritual power.

Traditionally a pilgrimage was a journey or an act of devotion undertaken for moral or spiritual reasons by a person.

The person was then known as "someone who wanders", or a "pilgrim".

The purpose for undertaking the journey may have been to venerate the sacred place or person, to ask for healing or help, to discharge a vow, or simply to enter into a sacred space to wander about and connect personally with the sacred within.

In the Christian tradition Life itself may be seen as a pilgrimage as we journey through the different stages of our years –through the many valleys and the hill tops on our journey to a spiritual maturity of our life in Christ.

In the readings this evening we journey from the old covenant into the new.

The prophet Jerimiah in the first reading, pronounces a verdict on the people.

The prophet is told by Yahweh to break the potter's earthenware jug in the sight of those who were leaders of the community.

This symbolic action illustrates the dynamic way of the prophetic word.

Breaking a piece of pottery, with Yahweh in mind as the potter, was a sign of total destruction initiated by the wrath of God.

Yahweh alone will realize the curse brought about, because, in this case, old practices of human sacrifice forbidden by law, had been reinstated.

The time for repentance had passed and the verdict of destruction upon the people was announced by the prophet Jerimiah.

Journeying on to the psalm, psalm 51, we hear an individual lament. A prayer for restoration.

And in Paul's letter to the Colossians we hear the way of the new covenant, not written on tablets of stone but upon the heart.

A new covenant that Jerimiah prophesied in chapter 31.

In the passage from Paul we hear described the characteristics of divine love and who we are, as the new creation in Christ.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you rightly, Paul writes, and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him.*

*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.*

*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the lord, fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.*

This part of the passage, and the part that is most focused on by some, speaks about a household code and instruction of a general type that can be found in popular Hellenistic philosophy.

It has been incorporated into Pauline theology and has been given a Christian ethical perspective.

Some theologians believe that there was concern for the structure of Christian groups in the wider society and that the wellbeing of the family household needed support and instruction.

The code reflects the social morals of the time.

In total three pairs are addressed; wives and husbands, children and parents and slaves and masters.

The subordinate member of each pair is first admonished to "be subject" and then the other member of the pair is charged with responsibility.

In today's world, especially in the West, equal status and shared responsibility particularly between husbands and wives is more the way of things.

Yet when we journey a little deeper into Paul's text, beyond the analytical we see each individual within each pair, is being asked to not make selfish waves, but rather to bring out the best in the other.

What Paul is describing in the passage, as I understand it, particularly when he writes about the characteristics of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness and the binding of love, which holds all together - what he is describing overall, is a life in union with God who is love, a life in which God is the ground of our being.

For us it is a question of acceptance and of realising it in our lives.

And how do we do this we might ask?

Well as we know the characteristics of love are not laws that we have to tick off as we attain them.

We don't say to ourselves, okay this week I'm going to work on my compassion.

Now if I do compassion this week, I'll start on patience next week and after that humility, meekness and kindness should all fall into place.

Wisdom will no doubt come naturally. Now if all goes according to my plan, I should be home and hosed as someone who is holy and beloved by Christmas.

Now if we think that such a way of being can be attained simply by our own efforts, we are being driven by our ego, our sense of control, and we have misjudged the way of Grace.

The way of union with God in Christ Jesus is about life of the Spirit which unfolds gently and steadily within us.

It is an organic process in our lives, for it is a continuous divine action.

What it asks of us, is surrender and acceptance rather than struggle, impatience and self-willed effort.

What it asks of us, is to not give up, but to continue on our pilgrimage with an open heart and a willingness to receive Him who is all and is in all.

The Lord be with you.