

Sermon for 27.8.17

Firstly I'd like to share with you a little about the clergy conference that I attended a little over a week ago.

The conference centered on clergy well-being and was held at the RACV resort at Noosa and first things first - the accommodation and food were fantastic.

The presenter, Tim Dyer, in his very relaxed - but informed way, offered resources and strategies that were easy to follow and that were steeped in the wisdom of common sense, experience and self-awareness.

If you are interested I can provide you with his blog details where you will find his presentations.

Tim also was the presenter at a lay conference held yesterday at North Pine parish and this conference was about how to grow a healthy parish and I am happy to say that David and Peter attended - and we will hear more about that over the next weeks.

For me, the bible study each morning at the clergy conference led by Peter Kline, the academic dean of St Francis College, was the highlight.

Just to give you a hint Peters approach, Peter's Phd research, focused on the figure of Søren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish theologian and philosopher, and one of the central themes that runs through Kierkegaard's writings is that of irony, specifically, the importance and necessity of irony for coming into contact with the deepest difficulties and truths of human existence.

Now perhaps that all sounds a bit heavy - but Peter negotiated all the deep spots with a lightness that was easy to follow and inspiring.

For the first time since I have been attending clergy conferences, Paul came along with me - and it was lovely - especially for Paul - for he spent time fishing, sailing and walking along the beach while I attended the presentations about Clergy wellbeing. The irony here is, if I'd been with Paul fishing, sailing and walking along the shores the issue of Clergy well-being for me, would not have been an issue at all.

Such talk about clergy conferences and bible studies brings me to the readings today and sharing with you any insight that I have.

Now after reflecting on the readings during the week I had the strong sense that I was being taken on a journey - a journey from the promise of salvation by God in the old testament reading to the reality of its fulfilment in the gospel and then on to how we are to live in that reality in the letter to the Romans. And I would like to invite you on that journey this morning.

But before we venture off with God, it is helpful to know about God's love and mercy for us, for this alone will be our main source of sustenance along the way.

So with God's love and mercy in our hearts, we venture into the reading from Isaiah that speaks about the promise of salvation that is to come.

The passage engages with us, the reader:

*Listen to me you who pursue righteousness and you that seek the lord.
Listen to me my people, I will bring my deliverance swiftlymy salvation will be forever, and
my deliverance will never be ended.*

The psalm this morning is one of thanksgiving for Yahweh's salvation activity.

The Gospel reading from Matthew is that wonderful story of Peter's confession of faith. The question that Jesus poses to the disciples, *Who do you say that I am?*

And Peter's response, *You are the Messiah, the Christ*, takes place at Caesarea Philippi, a place synonymous with false, manmade gods and idols.

The irony is that it is in a place of false gods that the Christ is proclaimed.

The false gods are trumped, by the truth of the living God.

In Matthew's gospel, Peter is the blessed one, for he has received the revelation from God that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Christ. Peter becomes the rock on which the church will be built. Matthew provides the authority of the church which is to come.

In the narrative of the gospels, the promise of everlasting salvation from of old, is realised in the revelation of the Christ at Caesarea Philippi.

Our journey from promise to reality now takes us to the application of Jesus as the Christ in our lives.

And this, my friends, is the tricky part, because this is the personal part.

Paul, in the epistle begs each one of us, *do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God.
Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think,
but be realistic, be of sober thought and judgement,
and accepting of your giftedness so that we can function as one in Christ.*

Translated into contemporary language I believe Paul is saying "don't get caught up in the standards of this world that have shaped you.

Shed all that stops you from becoming who you really are – your true self - so that you can receive guidance from God rather than from your ego.

The question that Jesus asked the first disciples, is asked of every disciple down through the ages. And sometimes in our life's journey it is asked over and over again.

Who do you say I am?

When we continue to answer,

You are the Christ! We confess with our hearts as well as our lips that we continue to journey with him in the pattern of transformation that he has shown us in his suffering, dying and rising.

For us, we follow him in the suffering and dying to our ingrained ways and in the rising with him in the newness of our resurrected life.

And always in the love and mercy of God – for it is only in the love and mercy of God in which we are held, that the pattern of transformation can be realised.

The Lord be with you.