

Sermon 2023 10 22 Text

The name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

Anoint Michael and Helen

Sometimes we offer the gift of a Bible on a special occasion in a person's life – a baptism, a confirmation, a wedding, an ordination, a Sunday School Prize, or a consolation when someone is travelling a difficult part of their journey.

When someone dies, their family often have no use for those bibles so they mistakenly think that Bibles are about church, so they decide they will assist a church by giving these old bibles to a church.

And there are often some things you can tell about the owner of the bible and the donor of the bible.

Some bibles that we receive are in almost pristine condition. They may be 50, 60, 70 years old – but they have never been opened or used.

And then there are those inspirational bibles that are obviously old: -- battered, dog-eared, falling apart – the property of someone who used them constantly, conscientiously, hopefully and joyfully.

=====

Of course, these days Bibles are available electronically, so we will never see the imprint of the user's hand upon them.

=====

That imprint is important to me. It is like a tool held so long that it bears the mark of the owner's hands, or perhaps several generations of hands.

=====

So, this tool is marked – sometimes first by the imprint of the giver which marks the occasion of the gift.

Books were so precious to me in my early life that I handled them carefully. No turned down corners, no ink, no obvious damage from use – or if there has been damage, then a careful repair.

=====

But in my own mind this tool is marked. I have come to divide the Bible into four parts, and this is often reflected in the marks of usage of those parts.

The Old Testament is a theological history of a very long and difficult period in the relationship between God and humanity.

The Gospels are a story of joy and relationship as humanity is brought back into relationship with God through the amazing body, mind, and spirit of Jesus.

The Epistles are a wonderful place to lose yourself because they are the story of the early church struggling to understand how to integrate Jesus and the gift of his life into the day-by-day footsteps of our own lives. They are the record of ordinary people search out how to live in a world that has been fundamentally changed by the life and death of Jesus and how we might live in relationship with the new manifestation of God and the set of new parameters by which we may experience of

the wholeness of life through refreshed eyes, and ears and hearts.

=====

And, sad though it makes me, the Book of Revelation is a completely foreign land to me – and unless I must, I do not want to travel in that place.

=====

So, some words from the “How To” section of Scripture which we read today.

From the second half of verse one of the first Chapter of the First Letter to the Thessalonians to verse three and then the first half of verse six.

“Grace to you and peace. 2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord...”

=====

The first part is a greeting and a calling to mind.

Grace to you and peace.

How wonderful would it be to greet every person we connect with in a day with this favoured greeting.

May grace rest upon you. May all that is wonderful, all that is beautiful, all that is empowering, all that is satisfying fill your life

today. And take from it all that is distracting, all that is hurtful, all that makes you think less of yourself and others. May all that be lifted from you; and liberate your body and your soul so that you may be free to soar and dream and hope.

And may you hold in the remembrance of the love in which you were formed, that belief in which you were brought to maturity, and the joy in which you are held now in the love of the ascended and glorified Christ and by us.

Imagine a world in which the whole of humanity is held in one giant hug. Each person is connected one to another and that connection becomes a conduit through which love and tranquillity flow – not just from the few people in your immediate vicinity but to and from every other person in this universal embrace.

And then imagine that desire of God in creation to be the completing embrace – those arms which may stretch round and lock in this globe-sized intertwining of humanity.

=====

And over all that the remembering of our faith, the remembering of our love, and the hope that stands eternally in God and is poured over this locked, embracing sphere of love like some custard over a Christmas pudding.

It adds a richness and an additional flavouring to that which is already a glorious feast.

=====

And then an amazing celebration that this custard covered Christmas pudding so interlocked with each other and then held

in place by the encircling power of God that we become imitators of the first people of faith.

For in the great intertwining is the sure and certain knowledge that we are created in God's desire and love for us all; that we live because of Christ's giving of himself in pain and writhing agony on the cross; and we exist with certainty now because we have seen the empty tomb and we have touched the wounds in his side.

=====

We have the capacity to be complete people because we share with and imitate the real presence of Christ within ourselves and within our community. We are not merely imitators of the Thessalonians; we are people who walk beside them in the certainty of the resurrection.

=====

Thanks be to God and God alone.

=====