



Alstonville Anglicans

Sunday 5th February 2023

Welcome



Sharing the Good Life

We acknowledge the Bundjalung people, traditional custodians of the Land.

Our doors are open: LGBTQIA+ welcome here.

Streaming licence: CCLI 102220

Alstonville Anglicans are committed to ensuring that all people who participate in our worship, programs and ministries have a safe and rewarding experience.

Tel: 66280231 www.anglicans.live

Bank account: BSB 705 077 / Acc:00032931

Dates 5th February to 12th February

5 th Feb		Sunday
	9am	Holy Communion
6 th Feb		Monday
	9am-12pm	Parish Office Open
	9am-3pm	Op Shop
	4pm	Floral Group meeting
	6-8pm	Spirit Ability meeting
7 th Feb		Tuesday
		Parish Office Closed (No office access)
8 th Feb		Wednesday
	9am-12pm	Parish Office Open
	9am	Anam Cara
	9am-3pm	Op Shop
	4pm	Worship / LLM meeting
9 th Feb		Thursday
	9am-12pm	Parish Office Open
	9am-3pm	Op Shop
	4pm	Anam Cara Planning meeting
	6pm	Anam Cara
10 th Feb		Friday
	9am-12pm	Parish Office Open
	10am	Holy Communion
11 th Feb		Saturday
	4pm	COVE Management meeting
		Sunday
12 th Feb	9am	Holy Communion

This bulletin contains current announcements and the week's calendar and the sermon notes from the previous Sunday. Use our welcome booklet for info and contact details for regular activities. Keep it as a reference tool. We welcome any feedback on the booklet...
[.../..//..welcomeBooklet v3.pdf](#)

Commmunity Engagement

To Make you Smile!



Our friend David
lost is 'id'.

Now we just call
him Dave!



Spirit Ability

Coming in 2023

Spirit Ability is a fellowship group
for Christians living with a
disability.

First meeting

Monday 6th February 6-8pm

The evening will include
a meal & sharing time.

Save the Date!

A.R.E.A. Movie Night

More details closer to
the date

A.R.E.A. is planning
another Film Night at
Ballina Cinemas

Sunday

12th February 2023

at 6pm



COVE Management Meeting



Saturday 11th February 4pm.

World Day of Prayer

Friday 3rd March 1.30pm

Uniting Church, crn Main St & Bugden Ave, Alstonville.

For more information contact Olwen king 6628 0522.

Pat Best



Thank you to everyone who made Pat's farewell so special. We wish her well.

Worship & Spirituality

Baptism



We welcome Alierah Cahill who comes with her family and friends to be baptised. Please remember Alierah and her family in your prayers.

Anam Cara Planning Meeting

Thursday 9th February 4pm

Nominations for Parish Positions close

Thursday 9th February

Parish Social Event

Rocky Creek Dam picnic 5th March 11.30am. BYO picnic & chair.

Empowering Leadership



AGM
Sunday 19 February 2023
at 10.30am in the church.

Sermon Notes

Matthew 25:31-46 1st January 2023

Identity please: Festival of the Holy Name

Names

Depending on which website you consult, the most popular name worldwide is Mohammed for boys and Sophia and its variations for girls. In developed countries the most popular names are usually James and Mary. In Australia Charlotte was the most popular name for girls and Oliver for boys. In a previous church that I served in, the name Barbara was so



widespread in the parish and the village there was a registered club for all women named Barbara. In South Africa the most popular girls' name in 2021 was Precious. Precious is not an unusual name. African people place heavy meaning in names, which is why I was saddened to

hear of child named "Mistake". Happily, Mistake is not a common name. African names such as Mercy, Lucky, Goodness, Happiness, and Blessing are usual, this in itself leads to some difficulties. Psalm 23 says "Shirley, Goodness, and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". Author Chris van Wyk thought this meant that his mother Shirley, together with Mercy and Goodness would be following him wherever he went in life.

As a woman priest there are obvious difficulties in employment that my male counterparts thriving in a patriarchal system would never experience. While being male might make my life easier, I thank God that I was born female, because my parents had decided to name a male child Heinrich-Lukkof after my paternal grandfather. African culture places heavy meaning in naming, as does Scripture.

Names in the Bible

In Genesis, Jacob the deceiver is renamed Israel meaning God is upright. Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. In the New Testament Saul becomes Paul after his mystical encounter.

The power of naming is at play in these early chapters of Luke's Gospel. When John the Baptist is born there is controversy at his circumcision on the 8th day. The cultural expectation is that his parents Elizabeth and Zechariah would name him Zechariah after his father. Instead, they name him John following the instructions of the angel.

Luke 1.59: "On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.' ⁶¹They said to her, 'None of your relatives has this name.' ⁶²Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed."

Notice how the author of Luke's Gospel uses the double as a literary device. Elizabeth and Mary are doubles, as are John and Jesus. Similar to John, Jesus is named before his birth.

Luke 2.21: After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb".

Jesus' name

Jesus means God saves us. Jesus is not the only name given to this child swaddled in a manger. The shepherds go to Bethlehem after the angel has told them about the one who is born is "saviour" and "messiah". Jesus. Emmanuel. Saviour. Messiah. Jesus is only 8 days old and already his list of names tells a story about his purpose, identity, his relationship with others and his relationship with God, his values, and his actions. On the 8th day Jesus is gifted with his name that describes his purpose as embodying God in the world - Emmanuel. His circumcision names Jesus' cultural belonging and national identity, his Jewish lineage, and his connection to the prophets. These are not the only names Jesus will be called. Later, some will call him "Drunk", "Glutton" and even "Beelzebub".

Names are more than a label for people. Names are powerful, they are multi directional. Jesus' name directs attention to Jesus' presence and the name evokes the experience of Jesus' presence too. In other words, praying the name Jesus or Christ brings his presence, his work in the world, his values, his essence into the present moment.

Our names

That is the point of a festival of the Holy Name – to consider, ponder and meditate on how a name directs identity, how we are in the world, and our purpose in life. So, what about you? What names do you carry? If Jesus is also Christ, Messiah, Counsellor, Saviour and according to his detractors

“Beelzebub” – what are your names? Some of our names denote belonging, relationship, purpose, and essence, as with Jesus. In addition to Mohammed, Sophia, James, and Mary our names might be mother, father, sister, brother, friend, teacher, mentor, caregiver, divorcee, widow, worker, retiree or aunt or uncle. What is our true name, our true identity?

The language of Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating and Richard Rohr is helpful. We are not who we think you are. The self you take to work, to your hobbies, the self that worships, that socialises with friends is the separate self, the ego, the false self. The false self is not the bad self, it is just not the true self. The separate self, the ego, is a construction of the mind and consciousness in response to life experience and is often constructed as a way to survive. The ego, the false self, establishes its identity by adding more and more: more names, more things, more moral behaviour, more enlightenment and for some more wealth or more things. Deeper than the false self, the separate self, or the ego, is the True Self. The True Self is connected to Source, to God. It’s our true name, our true identity as God’s Beloved. In contrast to the separate self which is established by addition, adding more things to identity, the True Self is recovered through subtraction, through letting go, through surrender, not adding more and more.

Our true name

Our path to the True Self is modelled by Mary. In hearing all that is said about Jesus she ponders and treasures these things in her heart. Luke 2.19: “¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” Treasuring and pondering in the heart is the descent into silence, experiencing and tasting God in pure emptiness.

1 January is naturally a time to reflect on the past year and reflect on who will be in the future. January is named after Janus, the two Romans mask that looks forwards and

backwards at the same time. Look back on the year that was. Who or what are you grateful for? When or where did you feel close to God? When and where did you feel far away from God? Having looked back we look forward also. Who do we want to be in the year ahead. What goal might we have? On the feast day of the Holy Name its worth asking who is choosing your goals, the true self, or the false self?

Sermon Notes

Matthew 3:13-17 8th January 2023



Matthew 17:1-7: Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "**This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!**" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

We celebrate the baptism of Jesus. The early audience of Matthew's Gospel would appreciate the many symbols and stories from the Hebrew Scriptures that are interwoven into the story of Jesus' baptism:

First, the spirit hovering over the water recalls Genesis 1 & 2 that describe the spirit like a wind resting on the waters of chaos

from which God created the world. When we read the Baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3 and remember Genesis 1 & 2 we are nudged to see Jesus as the New Creation. Through Jesus, God is doing something new in the world, Jesus as Christ represents a New Creation.

A second archetype woven into the story of Jesus' baptism is also in Genesis. Genesis 8 relates the story of Noah and the flood. Jesus recapitulates the story of the flood into his body by being fully immersed in the water, just as creation was fully immersed in water during the great flood. As Jesus emerges out of the water a dove descends on him. As Noah and the ark emerge out of the flood waters a dove bearing a green olive leaf returns to them. Again the message of hope and new life from the Great Flood are woven into the message of Jesus baptism.

A third story from the Hebrew Scriptures that Matthew relies on is the Exodus of God's people through the Red Sea. God's people living in slavery in Egypt are led into freedom by Miriam and her brother Moses. To reach freedom in the Promised Land the Hebrews travel safely through the Red Sea. The Exodus story symbolises the ideal of living as free people. Matthew's Gospel embodies the story of the Exodus in the baptism of Jesus and implies again that Jesus is a New Moses, a leader who will lead his people to freedom.

A fourth text that Matthew 3 depends on is from Isaiah 42: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles." In Matthew 12 Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath day and it is at this moment Isaiah 42 is used to describe Jesus. In Matthew 17.5 Jesus is on a mountain praying with Peter, James, and John when a voice from a cloud repeats the baptismal message: "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." The clouds symbolise Shekinah the presence of God.

A fifth memory that the baptism of Jesus relies on is obvious with the opening statement in Matthew 3.17: "Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan". Joshua 3.1 relates: "Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over." Joshua took over from Moses as leader of the Hebrews. In Joshua 3:14-17, God's people walk through the river Jordan as their ancestors walked through the Red Sea. The people of God follow the Levites who carry the ark of the covenant that symbolised God's presence. The river Jordan was in flood but dried up when the Levites bearing the ark entered the water, allowing the people to cross over the Jordan safely and on dry land. What is the ark? It was built by the Israelites under the leadership of Moses. The ark of the covenant is a chest made of acacia wood and covered in pure gold. Near the middle of the chest are two poles also covered in gold, these poles assisted the Levites in carrying the ark. Inside the ark was the ten commandments, Aaron's staff, and a jar of manna. On top of the ark was the mercy seat and on either side of the mercy seat were two winged angels, cherubim. According to Exodus 25.22, God spoke from the mercy seat: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites." The ark was a significant sacred artefact because it manifested God's presence with God's people. This is an important point, the ark meant God was real, God was near, God spoke, God was with you, God fulfilled the covenant: "I will be your God and you will be my people". For our reading of Matthew 3.17 today I suggest we latch onto this symbol. Just as Jesus is a New Creation so too is Jesus a new Ark of the Covenant.

The moment I wish us to focus on is the meeting point between Jesus ascending and the dove descending. The scripture describes the heavens being torn apart, a symbol portraying a

breakthrough, a watershed moment. Jesus ascends from the waters of baptism at the moment the spirit descends onto him in the form of a dove. Jesus becomes the place where heaven and earth meet, where grace and truth embrace and where righteous justice and peace kiss (Psalm 85.10). Jesus becomes the marriage of finite humanity with infinite divinity. Jesus becomes the ark of the covenant, the manifestation of God's presence in the world. The mystical moment for Jesus is when the boundaries between heaven and earth dissolve into one. I suggest that the Baptism of Jesus is unitive consciousness, a moment when Jesus knows that he is not separate from God. Like the ark of the covenant, a human thing of beauty signposting the nearness of divinity, Jesus manifests God's unity with finite reality. In his baptism Jesus is one with creation symbolised by being in water and also one with God symbolised by the voice from the clouds and the touch of the Spirit resting on him like a dove. Jesus experiences the universal and eternal truth that God is everywhere, that he is in God and that God is in him. It is said that the mercy seat between the two cherubim was where God pronounced forgiveness of sin. I suggest that sin we recover from is thinking that we separate from God or each other.

What Jesus' baptism mean for us? Jesus' baptism summarises a breakthrough in human consciousness, a new understanding that he is the son of God, he is the light of the world. Jesus' identity is that he is the son of God. Jesus' mission is to share his identity with us. Like Jesus, we too are sons and daughters of God. Jesus is the light of the world but his message to each of us is clear: "you are the light of the world". Jesus became what we are (human) so that we could become what he is (divine). The discovery of our true identity is God within. In baptism Jesus discovers his inner Christ. In baptism we discover our inner Christ, our union in the Divine, we discover the life-giving water that is the limitless nourishment for our life's

journey. Jesus is the destiny of our human evolution, a person from the future to which we are all moving. I like the image of the Ark of the Covenant and suggest we adopt it as a symbol of who we are for others. Like the ark of the covenant, we are a thing of human beauty covered in pure gold. Inside the ark are the tablets representing that we belong to God and God belongs to us. Like the ark the centre of who we are is God's mercy seat where every breath reminds us that we are in the breath of God's love, always one with God. Inside the Ark is manna, a symbol of God's sustenance. Likewise, inside each of us is our inner Christ, our true identity which is the limitless sustenance for our journey. Our baptism means that we are the ark in God's world, manifestations of God's presence, reminding those around us that God is near, God is real, God is within. One of the ways that I live out being an ark is through praying Bodhisattva's prayer for humanity:

May I be a guard for those who need protection
A guide for those on the path
A boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to cross the flood
May I be a lamp in the darkness
A resting place for the weary
A healing medicine for all who are sick
A vase of plenty, a tree of miracles
And for the boundless multitudes of living beings
May I bring sustenance and awakening
Enduring like the earth and sky
Until all beings are freed from sorrow
And all are awakened.

Sermon Notes

John 1:29-42 15th January 2023



"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! What is the lamb of God? What is the sin of the world? What does it mean for the lamb of God to take away the sin of the world?"

What is the lamb of God?

The lamb of God is a synonym for the Messiah. Later in the text the disciples will say to their friends "we have seen the Messiah!". The king of Israel, the Messiah is symbolised as a horned lamb or young wether. A wether is a young ram that has been castrated to stop his aggression, making him safe to keep among ewes and even as a pet.

In the Old Testament, a lamb is not the characteristic sin offering. The paschal lamb that remembers the Exodus from slavery to freedom is a precisely that – a memory of freedom and not a guilt or sin offering. The author of the letter to the Hebrews is correct in stating it is the blood of bulls and goats that take away sin, i.e. not lambs. The scape goat carried the sin of the Israelites into the desert, not the paschal lamb.

If the lamb of God is not sin offering but a symbol of liberty, how is it that the lamb of God takes away the sin of the world? What is the meaning of sin?

What is the sin of the world?

My observation is that most often people offer a moral or legal definition of sin. Sin is often described as moral evil or a violation of God's will or failure to obey God's commandments. People habitually describe sin as a failure to live up to a certain standard in thought, word or deed. Sin is often associated with human pride or wilfulness and disobedience. Some refer to sin as

“missing the mark.” Sin is often associated with feelings of guilt, shame and fear.

While not incorrect, these definitions of sin are one dimensional, only a small part of the story. So, what then is sin?

Sin is separation: separation from God, others, creation or within ourselves. One of the best definitions for sin is this:

Sin divides and having divided destroys that which it has divided. Love unites and by uniting transforms that which it unites.

The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world by obliterating sin completely. In other words, the lamb of God makes it possible to live in a world where there is no sin, no separation. We are invited into this new consciousness of mutual indwelling: us in God, God in us, us in each other, God and us in creation and creation in God and us. Sin is thinking, believing and feeling that we were ever separate from God. Sin is believing, thinking, or feeling that we were ever separate from each other. Imagine an atom with a proton, a neutron and an electron. Now imagine that the electron thinks that it is totally separate from the atom; it isn't! The electron is in the atom, the electron abides in the atom. Similarly, we are not separate from God nor are we separate from each other or creation. We are “in” each other, we abide in each other. When we abide in God and God abides in us and we abide in each other and creation, then there is no such thing as sin, there is no separation because heaven and earth are united, the finite and the infinite are one because they **abide** in each other.

Abide

In John 1:32-33 John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it **abided** on him”. The one on whom the Spirit **abides** is the one who baptises or immerses with the Holy Spirit.

In John 1.35-36, John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "where are you staying?" The question "where are you staying," or "meno" is better translated as "**where are you abiding**".

The word abiding is a golden thread through the Gospel of John. Out of 120 occurrences of the verb *menō* (abide) in the New Testament, 69 come from the Johannine tradition (or 57.5%). The Christmas Gospel celebrates the Word becoming flesh and abiding with us. John 14.23 Jesus says to his disciples that the Trinity: "... we will come to them and make our home with them" or abide with them. John 17.20 is Jesus' prayer: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us...".

How do we abide in God?

Abiding means the Divine Logos indwells humanity. It happens when we allow God to ask us deep questions: what are you looking for?

Are you a religious person, seeking information about the little details of the law?

Are you a zealot, seeking a liberation fighter?

Are you like the Sadducees seeking a place of power or security?

Or are you a person thirsty for God, in touch with your own restlessness and anxiety, open enough to allow your emptiness to be satisfied by God? The instinct of the great spiritual traditions is that the gate of heaven is within us as a seed of divinity, God already abides in us. Thomas Merton describes how

At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, ... a spark which belongs entirely to God. This little point of nothingness

and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is God's name written in us...It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of the sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely ... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere. (Conjectures of a guilty bystander (1966:142) New York: Doubleday).

This is the truth about who you are: God delights in you as if you were God. You are to know from the centre of your being that you are beloved of God, to know your capacity for relationship. The truth is that God calls all of us as Jesus called those first disciples, God in Jesus says to each of us, come and see. Let us believe that God calls us into life-giving relationship, let us believe that God calls each of us for a particular work of love. The experience of unity consciousness, of mutual indwelling is well captured in this poem song by Leonard Cohen. Pay attention especially to the last verse. "But there was nothing left between the Nameless and the Name" describes the mutual indwelling, abiding in God who abides in us.

Love Itself by Leonard Cohen

The light came through the window,
Straight from the sun above,
And so, inside my little room
There plunged the rays of Love.

In streams of light, I clearly saw
The dust you seldom see,
Out of which the Nameless makes
A Name for one like me.

I'll try to say a little more:
Love went on and on

Until it reached an open door-
Then Love itself.
Love itself was gone.

All busy in the sunlight
The flecks did float and dance,
And I was tumbled up with them.
In formless circumstance.

Then I came back from where I'd been.
My room, it looked the same-
But there was nothing left between
The Nameless and the Name.

Sermon Notes

Matthew 4:12-23 22nd January 2023

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the
Gentiles—

the people who sat in darkness

have seen a great light,

and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death

light has dawned.'

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in

the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

“I would rather be fishing”.

I am sure you have read the bumper sticker that says: “I would rather be fishing.” I respect the fact that many find fishing a relaxing pastime, I am happy that this is a positive experience for them. The lure of fishing is enjoying the great outdoors, breathing fresh air alongside the ocean or a river, perhaps even relaxing with friends.

There is a darker side to fishing though, isn't there? I'm not referring to the dangerous hooks left on beaches, riverbanks and in the ocean. Nor am I referring to fishing line, fishing weights and other fishing litter that isn't always carefully discarded, causing harm to the environment, mammals in particular. What I am referring to is that fish do not want to be caught.

Success for the angler means death for the fish. First the fish has a sharp hook tearing through the flesh of its mouth. Then the fish is pulled by this hook. As the fish is ripped from its home, it gasps for breath, choking slowly to death, flipping from one side to another in a spine breaking attempt to suck in air, unless a merciful knife through the brain ends its suffering. Now, does



being fished sound like something you want to happen to you?

Fish do not want to be caught any more than humans want to be fished. Brian Blount, a New Testament professor in Virginia, USA says that “I hear people say all the time that they don't like to hear direct asks for

time, talent, and treasure in the church. Let's just admit it. We don't like people fishing our calendar, fishing our commitment, and certainly not fishing our finances. Not the IRS. Not the state. Not the people on the street corners. Not the preachers in their pulpits."

Follow me, says, Jesus, and I will make you fish for people. Fishing for people? Luring people, baiting them, hooking them, netting, and dragging them out of their comfort zones to be knifed and gutted? Yet how else can we explain what Jesus did to these first disciples when they abandoned everything to follow him?

Into the text

A careful reading of Matthew 4.13-23 reminds us of the following. Herod arrested John the Baptist, mentor, and cousin to Jesus. John challenged Herod for colluding with Rome. John criticised the toxic culture of exploitation and oppression festering in 1st century Judea. Jesus withdrew to Galilee, the land of Naphtali and Zebulon

You may be asking how Matthew's reference to Naphtali and Zebulon, two Old Testament cities, is relevant to Galilee in 30CE. The symbol of Naphtali and Zebulon has several layers. First, while the land of Galilee is occupied by the Roman powers, Matthew dares to remind his listeners that the land belongs to God: it is not Roman Land, it is Naphtali and Zebulon, where the light shines. Second, the land of Zebulon and Naphtali is a direct reference to Isaiah 9.1-4 where the Assyrian king, Tigleth Pileser, took the Israelite into captivity, in 732 BCE. The Assyrian exile was terrifying, a time of oppression, depression, confusion, and dehumanisation. The gospel writer is drawing parallels between Assyria and Rome. For those who sit in the region and shadow of death, whether it is 732 BCE, 30 CE or even 2023, a light has dawned. Third, Galilee is a powerful symbol; it is not Jerusalem - the centralised city, it is on the

outskirts, it is marginal. Jesus is declaring faith in a "God of the margins." Moreover, Galilee is the land of the Gentiles, the radical inclusivity of God is clear: the light is for all nations and for all people, Jews, and Gentiles.

"Follow me"

It is from the margins, Galilee of the Gentiles, that Jesus interrupts people's lives. Jesus' message is simply that the darkness is not all there is. Yes, John is in prison because of Herod, yes there is corruption, injustice, and the soul-destroying depression from surviving in oppressed conditions. There is another kingdom, another reality, if we have the courage to turn around and go in another direction, we will find an alternative. This alternative, what is called the kingdom of God, is closer than we think! It is at hand, it is within, it is God's presence that is everywhere.

Jesus interrupts the well-ordered lives of Andrew, Simon, James, John, and their father Zebedee and says, "Follow me". These disciples leave successful business, families, homes, and all that is loved and familiar to fish for people.

Jesus walks near the Sea of Galilee. The sea is a symbol for a change, it is a symbol of conversion. Andrew, Peter, James, and John are called to repent, for the Kingdom of heaven, God's presence, is close, it is everywhere.

"Repent".

'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near' Jesus said. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience who do not refer to God directly. Thus, the word heaven means God. Repent for God's kingdom is at hand, it is near, it is close. If these statements are understood the whole Gospel is understood. If these statements are misinterpreted, then the whole Gospel is misinterpreted. The kingdom of God is not the institutional church. Nor is the Kingdom of God, heaven, the place we go after we die. No, the kingdom is the presence of God that is everywhere.

The Gospel writers were writing in Greek, influenced by Greek philosophy, particularly Plato. Repent in Greek is metanoia which some translate as to change your heart or change your mind, but the meaning is deeper than this. In platonic philosophy, reality is interpreted in four levels: the level of the body, the level of the individual soul, the level of the collective soul or nous, and the level of God. Metanoia means go beyond the nous. In metanoia we cease to identify with the body and the individual soul. We even go beyond the nous; we go beyond the collective soul to be "in God". To be "in God", to go beyond the nous, is like the fish that is caught and taken out of the water.

"Like a fish out of water"

I suggest that the metaphor of a fish caught by anglers may be a helpful one. Perhaps you have heard the expression, like a fish out of water. Much of discipleship is like being a fish out of water, you are literally transformed from one way of being to another. Discipleship is not a lifestyle choice; it is a total and utter transformation. To continue the fish metaphor, to be fished is not leaving one coral castle behind to live in the Great Barrier Reef. If you are fished, you are changed – the life you knew is gone and a life you could never have imagined has begun. We are lured, hooked, and caught and give up everything for God's kingdom, that is what it means to be fished.

Sermon Notes

Matthew 5:1-12 29th January 2023



Australia Day makes us think about our Nation. When we think of our lucky country there is more than just our beautiful geography and our incredible resources. Australia day is a day to reflect on how we get

along with other people in our country. It's a special day of thinking about what it's like to live here. Many people talk of wanting things to be different and many have definite ideas of what is needed. It would be good if we were more ready to chew things over in respectful discussions; to listen to other points of view.

But we frequently hear opinions that are not open to discussion. We hear loud and non-negotiable criticisms of Government. However, there have always been people challenging the authority of governments. This became more prominent with the arrival of television and media becoming more independent.

The decade of 1960's (the time of my early years in the Navy and my service in Vietnam) was a wild time for flower power and protests. It's mainly remembered for so many people boldly (and sometimes violently) "Questioning Authority." Loud and frequent criticism of authority became commonplace.

It was this serious challenging of the authority of governments growing through the 70s that made possible the extraordinary dismissal of Gough Whitlam. Challenges to authority weren't just happening in Australia. The words "we shall overcome" were sung right around the world. More recently we have heard "we're not going to take it anymore".

There's a great story of South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu challenging authority. Bishop Tutu said to the Minister of Law and Order of South Africa: "Mr. Minister, we must remind you that you are not God. You are just a man. And one day your name shall merely be a faint scribble on the pages of history, while the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church, shall live forever".

In that story there is an echo of what we heard this morning in first reading from the Prophet Micah. As with most of the

Prophets, Micha was clearly focused on social justice. He says, "what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God".

Today's gospel reading from Matthew tells of Jesus at the start of his ministry talking to people who wanted to challenge the oppressive Roman authorities. The Jews were living under Roman rule and were denied the right of self-governance. Worse still, they were made to pay exorbitant taxes and live by many Roman laws they considered unjust and discriminatory.

So, Jesus sits down to teach and encourage these people who are drastically unhappy with the way they are being governed. These are people who don't like the place they find themselves in. They are disillusioned with authority and distressed that God is not doing anything to change their lives.

Do you remember the old days of travelling with the kids in slow cars with often boiling radiators on narrow winding roads. Coping with Burringbar hill and the Bulladealah curves before the highway was upgraded. The kids would regularly ask "are we there yet?"

Carol and I did a lot of trips from Canberra to Sydney. If they saw some houses, the kids would ask "Is this Sydney now?" and I would say "No! This is only Mittagong". And they had to trust you. The only evidence they had that they were actually going to Sydney was you saying that you were going there. They had to trust you when you said "There's some more travelling to be done. We're not there yet."

Jesus wants people to make a journey. He is really wanting to take us to a different place; a new place.



But, we are not there yet. We just have to accept the fact that our journey isn't over.

In Luke, there's a parallel to this sermon on the mount described by Matthew. Luke tells of Jesus saying the same things in a level place. So, Luke's version is known as The Sermon on the Plain. I'm sure that Jesus said the same or similar things to many different individuals and groups at different times. So, these sermons are probably a collection of things that Jesus taught.

The message that Jesus is trying to get through to his impatient and sometime unruly children, is that we are not yet at our destination. We need to travel a bit further along the road. Perhaps, we should spend some time thinking about where we are going in our life.

In writing down these "sermons", Matthew and Luke are trying to get us to see that we have to trust Jesus when he says "sorry kids, we are not there yet". We have not reached our destination, but the good news is that Jesus is travelling along with us on our journey.

In Psalm 139, we are told that no matter what we do, (or don't do), no matter where we go, God is always there with us. The writer of this Psalm asks God, "Where could I flee from your presence?" and then runs through a list of possible places: heaven, the point of the sunrise, the end of the sea, in the darkness, in the womb. Then the psalm writer answers the question by admitting that wherever we might go, God will be there.

Coming back to today's reading from Matthew. As we make our journey, Jesus gives us a glimpse of our destination. He describes the way things will be, not the way things are now.

So, Jesus teaching begins, "Blessed are you who *are poor in Spirit*. And aren't we all poor in Spirit? Jesus is being encouraging. He is telling us that things aren't really the way

people think. At our destination, there is a big reversal of what we expect. We imagine that the blessing is on those rich in spirit (the ones we think are powerful in prayer, active in worship, and generous to others); but Jesus says the blessing is on the poor in spirit (those who don't know how to pray, who never come to church, who are not accustomed to giving).

And so on. Blessed are those who mourn (not blessed are those who have never suffered grief). Blessed are the meek (not those who are skillfully assertive). Blessed are the pure in heart and blessed are the peacemakers.

This is where we are going. These beatitudes are a description of our destination. We are being encouraged to look around and to know that "we are not there yet!" And we are being stimulated to have trust; to understand and truly believe that we are being taken to a good place.

But we still need to do a bit of travelling to get there.

Sometimes, we come to church thinking that Christianity is mostly about doing good things; becoming motivated to do better, developing an improved ("more Godly") attitude. But sometimes, at its best, church is a way of seeing, of having a vision. "Good church" can be getting lost in a daydream of finally arriving at a great destination. Do you remember the old church words "lost in wonder, awe and praise"?

I've heard a definition of Christianity as being "training in how to pay attention". It is so easy to get distracted in this life by false images of success, and false images of failure.

Church is a way of seeing; paying attention! Growing in trust that there is a better place to be.

Maybe Jesus feels that if he can just get us looking in the right direction, looking at life from the right perspective, our actions, the way we live, will take care of itself.

Then, we'll find ourselves getting closer to our real destination.

5th February 2023

Sentence of the Day

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5.16

Collect

Faithful God,
you have appointed us your witnesses,
to be a light that shines in the world:
let us not hide the bright hope you have given us,
but tell everyone your love,
revealed in Jesus Christ the Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 5.13-20

¹³ 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ¹⁴ 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. ¹⁷ 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until

heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

