

## The Three Gods – Lawrence Peak

Sunday July 29<sup>th</sup> 2018 – Pentecost 10

The title of our thoughts today is “The Three Gods” and I suppose many would be expecting a talk about the Holy Trinity – Father Son and Holy Ghost. That of course is a very important part of our Christian heritage and deserves quite a few sermons as we struggle to understand how there can be three Gods and yet only one! The Triune God! All very important but actually not the centre of our thoughts today.

I rather would like to consider the God of the Old Testament, the God of today and the God of Jesus.

In our lectionary reading today from the second book of Samuel we come to meet Uzzah. Poor Uzzah! For as King David’s men were transporting the ark of the covenant on a cart, the oxen stumbled and naturally enough, Uzzah reached out to steady the ark that was probably teetering a little, and he actually touched the ark and was struck dead by God as this was strictly forbidden.

The ark was absolutely holy in the Israelites eyes and God had strictly forbidden that it ever be touched. It was always to be transported by two carrying poles – not a cart – and was to be covered by a cloth so that it couldn’t even be looked at. According to 1 Samuel (6:19) some 70 people were struck dead by God simply for looking into the Ark.

At first sights one would think that the Israelites were worshipping a “God in a Box” rather like a “Jack in a Box” or a “Genie in a Bottle” rather restricting when you have the entire Universe to create and maintain! But actually it was rather a focal point for God. It contained the tablets on which the ten commandments were inscribed and Aaron’s rod - the centre piece of many miracles when they were travelling to the promised land from Egyptian exile. A place where you could interact with God with searing holiness. God was said to have given instructions to Moses from the two cherubim mounted on the top of the Ark.

The ark was always carried into battle in front of the Israelite troops meaning that their God would lead them into battle and confound the enemies.

But back to poor Uzzah – struck dead for trying to help! Here we come face to face with the Old Testament God who has no compunction in striking people dead on the spot. Where whole cities can be annihilated including all men women and particularly innocent children. I don't know what actually happened to Uzzah – although I believe in those ancient times that many natural events were attributed to the hand of a vengeful God. Maybe Uzzah struck his head as he fell, maybe it was heart attack brought on by the enormous stress of the event. We don't really know except that it was clearly the hand of God in the Israeli's eyes.

Here we meet the Old Testament God whose very name was too holy to even mutter. So he was JHWH the unpronounceable God.

There is an underlying brutality that runs through the pages of the Old Testament – particularly when we are talking about vengeance against the ungodly. The writer of Psalm 137 wants the forces who liberate the Children of Israel from Babylonian exile to take the Babylonian infants and dash their heads upon a stone! And the Old Testament God is assumed to support this brutality and barbarism.

We now turn to God in our modern age. We are now at the other end of the spectrum completely! For many he is a non-issue, irrelevant as he doesn't exist; just a figment of our wishful thinking and imagination.

For many he is just a figure of speech used for emphasis or exclamation, such as “Oh My God” this or “Oh My God “that - shortened to OMG if you are sending text messages.

For many he would fall into the category where you only call on him in an emergency – the SOS God! Only needed when things start to go horribly wrong, he is the last resort when all other avenues have been exhausted.

For many he is rather like a “Best Buddy” to whom we talk as if we were talking to a neighbour over the back fence.

For many he is like Santa Claus who exists only to give us good things when we ask for them.

Very few approach him with anything like the holiness and majesty we see in the Old Testament.

The Muslims have a phrase “White Hot Majesty” to refer to their God Allah. And maybe in this modern day and age we should take a little of this on board when we approach our God.

If we believe in God at all these days our God has become decidedly mushy!

So there we have the two sides of the spectrum and where do we stand? And as in so many problems we need to turn to Christ and discover the God of Jesus.

The first thing to acknowledge is that Jesus would not throw away the Old Testament Holus Bolus. In fact, he was always quoting from it and it was an integral part of his upbringing. He knew his scriptures and could argue points of law with the Scribes and Pharisees in the synagogue.

He also acknowledged the majesty of his Father and threw the money changers out of the temple in a fury because they were defiling his Father’s house. His standard of holiness often went far further than was acceptable in earlier days.

- *You have heard it said Do not murder But I say unto you anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement.*
- *You have heard it said Do not commit adultery but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
- *You have heard it said do not break your oath, but I say unto you do not swear at all.*
- *You have heard it said eye for eye and tooth for tooth but I say unto you love your enemy, do good to those who hate you.*

The main difference is that Jesus operated from love and redemption and not retribution. However it was not a mushy love but an active concern for the well-being of the other person. Yet it was a love that would separate the sheep from the goats and send the sheep to eternal life and the goats to eternal punishment.

So the God of Jesus was a loving firm Father, completely interested in our lives and our feelings and completely interested in welcoming us into communion with him – but not our best buddy nor a vending machine. Nor is he a God who

condones anything we choose to do, or looks the other way so as not to pressure us too much.

And he doesn't seem to be a God who strikes us dead if we are wayward but will not stop us if we insist on wreaking our own destruction with drugs, fast cars, dissipative living and the like.

The father of the prodigal son did not stop him heading off for all sorts of profligate living. Of course he was overjoyed when the son came to his senses, repented and asked his father for forgiveness, but he did not stop him adopting a life that would have destroyed him. God does not wreak vengeance but will allow us to wreak our own destruction.

Jesus was and is the Son of God. There is no-one who was and is closer to God. He is God in focus for us in human and understandable terms. If we are to commit our lives to God, then it makes sense to fall on our knees before the God of Jesus. If we do this and let this God flood into our lives, then we will live our lives more and more like Jesus Christ. I cannot think of a more worthy goal than this.

As in the song      *Day by Day,*  
*These things I pray.*  
*To see Thee more clearly,*  
*To Love Thee more dearly*  
*And to follow Thee more nearly day by day.*

The picture of God in the Old Testament has been coloured somewhat by the primitive interpretations of the day. Although there is much that is wonderful in the Old Testament, and there are many wonderful stories and lessons to be learnt – we need to realise that this is a gradual progression – an unfolding of understanding which came to rich fruition in the life and teachings of Jesus

The picture of the God of the modern day is coloured by a philosophy of convenience. By an outlook driven by selfishness, cynicism and a secularism that leaves little room for the Godly revelation that we see in the life of Christ.

The message of the three Gods. Only one of these comes close to the truth and that is the God of Jesus Christ.

In this modern and very scientific age, let us fall on our knees and worship him!

Amen