



Seventh Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, July 28th, 2019

CHANGING REALITY...

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS...

CHANGING RESPONSES...



The Bible never speaks about God nor human beings in isolation. Rather, both are spoken of in relationship with each other. As we read the Hebrew Bible, we see God and human beings interpreted in changing ways: The Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) speak of God in covenant/relationship with his people, born in the experience of Exodus, which becomes the guiding light for the idea of freedom and justice, so central to Hebrew self-understanding. But there is also the Wisdom material, that tends to philosophize about God and humanity in a broader way: examples are Job, Ecclesiastes, the Psalms, and Proverbs. Finally, there are the prophets, who almost as one, call the Hebrews back to the memory of Exodus and the passion for freedom and justice, in situations where they have lost their way. The New Testament, is not quite as broad, written in a much tighter time-frame and responding to the needs and challenges of specific Christian communities, each with their own problems, in the first century AD. Read as a whole, one can see how thought in the Bible changes through time: changing reality provokes changing perceptions and changing responses. This includes even doctrine: statements of belief that are broadly held to, but interpreted differently as conditions and circumstances move on.

These last weeks, we have been focusing upon human psychology and behaviour. Last week, we read the story of Mary and Martha which shed light upon human rivalry. The week before, we read the story of the Good Samaritan, examining the way life is filled with interruptions, in the form of others, to whom Jesus Christ asks us to respond.

Today, we read both the Hebrew Bible with regard to the difficult text about Sodom and Gomorrah and then the Gospel reading about the Lord's Prayer. What we discover in these two readings, is the change that occurs in the interpretation and understanding of faith over time; that even our very understanding of God changes in the light of human experience.

GATHERING

Announcements

We sing

Dona Nobis Pacem
(Translation: Give Us Peace)

Pronounced Don-na No-beece Pah-chem Traditional

1
Do - na no - bis pa - cem. pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

2
Do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

3
Do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

Welcome

Hymn: O for a thousand tongues (TiS 210, Lyngham, Charles Wesley)

A Prayer about the Changing Perceptions of Faith

It is quite a common-place that people of faith struggle with change. The reasons are complex and varied, however it often has to do with the way we use and understand faith-language: what we mean by it. Christian doctrines in particular, that carry centuries of history with them, are especially difficult and have multiple meanings. Ideas such as “God”, “grace”, and the “Holy Spirit”, for example, are words which raise as many questions as they answer. Something that stands out in the Bible in particular, is that Jesus’ own faith-language was different to that of his Hebrew contemporaries: his religious opponents in the temple and the synagogues. In fact, Jesus’ new use of faith words and the new meaning he lent them, explains the conflict that occurred.

In the prayer below, based upon the Gospel reading for today, that includes Luke’s version of the “Our Father” or Lord’s Prayer, we learn about the extraordinary grace or generosity of God. In fact, this is *the* point of the Lord’s Prayer: that God is scandalously generous... way beyond what the orthodoxy of Jesus’ day, felt comfortable with, way beyond what many Christians today, would accept.

Lord, teach us to pray!

***A request from disciples
eager to know more.***

He tells a story
of a nocturnal knocking,
requesting three loaves.

Don't ask me for bread;
 that is far too much trouble!
 (This could not happen in the Middle East where hospitality is prized)

The story's hearers
 would have laughed in disbelief.
Quite impossible!

Hospitality's
 demands for generousness
are laid before us.

God is generous
 When we come in prayer
 to God we can be assured:
God is here for us, for his creation.

Ken Rookes 2019

The Peace

SMG

Introduction

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Anecdotal Thoughts about Changing Faith

I live on the other side of Copernicus and Galileo; I can no longer conceive of God as sort of above the sky, looking down and keeping record books.

John Shelby Spong

I think a Christian definition of the mind should be openness to whatever the individual and collective mind reveals to us. We are open to God, in the sense that we are not delimited, not organisms with fixed attributes in the manner of the other creatures, but are

instead participants in a broad and deep reality that utterly exceeds our powers of description.

Marilynne Robinson

When I grew up in the South, I was taught that segregation was the will of God, and the Bible was quoted to prove it. I was taught that women were by nature inferior to men, and the Bible was quoted to prove it. I was taught that it was okay to hate other religions, and especially the Jews, and the Bible was quoted to prove it.

John Shelby Spong

Genesis 18:20-33 (The Message)

Shirley Luttrell

Sodom and Gomorrah are synonymous with those places of sexual sin, although the real issue was about rejection and abuse, including sexual abuse of the outsider, the stranger. In this part of the story, we find Abraham negotiating with God to not destroy the cities if only just a few residents are found. Latest commentaries emphasize the relative compassion of God willing to save the community, however the point remains that it is Abraham who defends the people, persuading God to mercy and compassion. The theological and moral pendulum of the story remains with God as one who functions legally, threatening punishment.

²⁰⁻²¹ GOD continued, “The cries of the victims in Sodom and Gomorrah are deafening; the sin of those cities is immense. I’m going down to see for myself, see if what they’re doing is as bad as it sounds. Then I’ll know.”

²² The men set out for Sodom, but Abraham stood in GOD’s path, blocking his way.

²³⁻²⁵ Abraham confronted him, “Are you serious? Are you planning on getting rid of the good people right along with the bad? What if there are fifty decent people left in the city; will you lump the good with the bad and get rid of the lot? Wouldn’t you spare the city for the sake of those fifty innocents? I can’t believe you’d do that, kill off the good and the bad alike as if there were no difference between them. Doesn’t the Judge of all the Earth judge with justice?”

²⁶ GOD said, “If I find fifty decent people in the city of Sodom, I’ll spare the place just for them.”

²⁷⁻²⁸ Abraham came back, “Do I, a mere mortal made from a handful of dirt, dare open my mouth again to my Master? What if the fifty fall

short by five—would you destroy the city because of those missing five?”

He said, “I won’t destroy it if there are forty-five.”

²⁹ Abraham spoke up again, “What if you only find forty?”

“Neither will I destroy it if for forty.”

³⁰ He said, “Master, don’t be irritated with me, but what if only thirty are found?”

“No, I won’t do it if I find thirty.”

³¹ He pushed on, “I know I’m trying your patience, Master, but how about for twenty?”

“I won’t destroy it for twenty.”

³² He wouldn’t quit, “Don’t get angry, Master—this is the last time. What if you only come up with ten?”

“For the sake of only ten, I won’t destroy the city.”

³³ When GOD finished talking with Abraham, he left. And Abraham went home.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm 85

Shirley Luttrell

Psalm 85 combines a sense of expectancy and waiting for the Lord to deliver the people with reflection on a past time of deliverance and forgiveness. The psalm breaks into three sections: vv. 1-3; vv. 4-7; and vv. 8-13. The beginning of the psalm, vv. 1-3 is about the past. Verses 4-7 are concerned about the present. No longer is the past tense used. Verses 4 and 7, which open and close the section, are full of imperatives (‘restore us again’, ‘put away your indignation’; ‘show us your steadfast love’, ‘grant us your salvation’). They are separated by questions about the immediate future (‘will you ... will you ...will you?’). In the concluding section, vv. 8-13, the mood and the tenses change again. The verbs are now in the future tense. The mood is not only optimistic, but overflows into hyperbole with delightful expressions and turns of phrase. This psalm is not simply one which seeks to lift us from present despair into a future that bears no relation to present experience or reality. The psalm begins with a statement that Yahweh had been favourable to the land (v. 1). It hopes that Yahweh’s glory will again dwell in the land (v. 9). And it finishes with the confidence that Yahweh will give what is good and the land will yield its increase (v. 12). Hope in the coming nearness of the Lord’s salvation embraces the physical reality of life and its earthy elements. This is a psalm that speaks to the experience of drought and water shortages experienced from time to time in the Australian context.

- ¹ You, LORD, showed favour to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- ² ***You forgave the iniquity of your people
and covered all their sins.***
- ³ You set aside all your wrath
and turned from your fierce anger.
- ⁴ ***Restore us again, God our Saviour,
and put away your displeasure toward us.***
- ⁵ Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger through all generations?
- ⁶ ***Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?***
- ⁷ Show us your unfailing love, LORD,
and grant us your salvation.
- ⁸ ***I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly.***
- ⁹ Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- ¹⁰ ***Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.***
- ¹¹ Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.
- ¹² ***The LORD will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.***
- ¹³ Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.

Luke 11:1-13 (JB Phillips Translation)

Philip Southwell

In this account of Jesus where the “Our Father” or Lord’s Prayer is offered as a method of prayer by Jesus, the theological and moral pendulum swings to a celebration of God as merciful and compassionate. Punishment is banished as the Prayer of the Kingdom is prayed as a prayer of god’s generosity: food not just for today but for tomorrow and liberation/freedom through the dynamic of forgiveness. God through Jesus is crazily lavish in his kindness.

11 One day it happened that Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said, “Lord, teach us how to pray, as John used to teach his disciples.”

2-4 “When you pray,” returned Jesus, “you should say, ‘Father, may your name be honoured—may your kingdom come! Give us each day the bread we need, and forgive us our sins, for we forgive anyone who owes anything to us; and keep us clear of temptation.’”

5-8 Then he added, “If any of you has a friend, and goes to him in the middle of the night and says, ‘Lend me three loaves, my dear fellow, for a friend of mine has just arrived after a journey and I have no food to put in front of him’; and then he answers from inside the house, ‘Don’t bother me with your troubles. The front door is locked and my children and I have gone to bed. I simply cannot get up now and give you anything!’ Yet, I tell you, that even if he won’t get up and give him what he wants simply because he is his friend, yet if he persists, he will rouse himself and give him everything he needs.”

9-10 And so I tell you, ask and it will be given you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. The one who asks will always receive; the one who is searching will always find, and the door is opened to the man who knocks.”

11-13 “Some of you are fathers, and if your son asks you for some fish, would you give him a snake instead, or if he asks you for an egg, would you make him a present of a scorpion? So, if you, for all your evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Lord hear my praying (TiS 689, Lara, Robin Mann)

A film-clip from the Vicar of Dibley

Geraldine Granger has arrived to take up her appointment as Vicar of Dibley to the horror of David Horton who is determined to resist the modernist ‘heresy’ of women’s ordination. One suspects that David’s opposition can be accounted for by his issues with women which conservative doctrine conveniently masks. (9:58-14:10)

Some Thoughts... “Rethinking Things”

Let’s Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication**Prayers of the People**

John Egarr

The one who offers the prayers, ends each series of requests with the words "Give us your grace". The response of the congregation will be "so we may be gracious".

Closing Hymn: Love Divine (TIS 217, Blaenwern, Charles Wesley,)

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!

God in Jesus help us to change, as change changes us

To know the need for it

To deal with the pain of it

To feel the joy of it

To undertake the journey without understanding the destination

Our service has ended

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Going Out: May the feet of God walk with you (TiS 779, Aubrey Podlich)

Musical Postlude

Organist:

Jim Abraham