

Christ Church Freemantle

Sunday 25th October – Last Sunday after Trinity

We come this Sunday to the end of the long string of Sundays called “after Trinity” or “Ordinary Time”, and for the next few weeks there is a change of gear, as we have Sundays of remembering – All Saints Day, Remembrance Sunday – and also start to look forward to the beginning of another Church Year on Advent Sunday.

This Sunday is also sometimes known as Bible Sunday, and the Collect for the Day focusses our thoughts on our holy book:

*Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning:
help us to hear them,
to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.*



In days when everything seems so uncertain, when the life we knew and took for granted has been so radically changed by Covid-19, looking again at the Bible can help us to get a sense of perspective. This library of books – 66 in all (39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament) is a collection of all kinds of literature. Poetry, songs, books of the law, accounts of the history of the Israelite people, prophecy, stories which try to explain how the world and its people grew from earliest times. Most importantly for us as Christians are the four Gospels, which help us to understand the life and purpose of Jesus Christ, and his significance for us today.

Getting the longer view can help us cope with the present times. The Old Testament tells the story of God’s people the Jews, and how God was beside them through thick and thin. As they became one nation from scattered tribes and families, as they survived slavery, wanderings in the desert, settlement in their own land, many battles, God stayed with them. Their loyalty to him was not so constant! Stories of the Golden calf, worship of the Baals, waywardness of all kinds, are examples of a people who weren’t good at staying faithful. And when eventually the nation was largely destroyed and taken into exile, even then they weren’t very good at following God’s way, though in time he restored them to their homeland again.

The birth, life and death of Jesus shows just how far God was ready to go for his children, yet even within the Gospels and the early Christian letters in the New Testament we see signs of human waywardness. The disciples who wanted the best seats; the inability of those closest to Jesus to trust, the weakness of those who ran away or denied Jesus in his worst hours. And as the message of Christ was taken across the Mediterranean countries by the first Evangelists things were still far from perfect – there were factions and jealousies and arguments. Yet God through Jesus remains constant – the message is there, one of encouragement and hope and love and love.

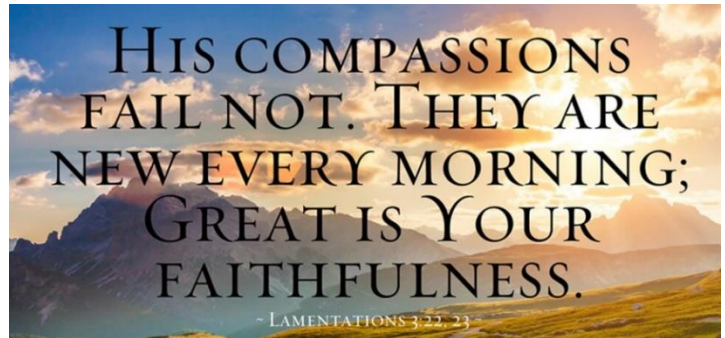
Today's Gospel (Matthew 22.34-46) has the crux of the whole Bible story in the answer Jesus gives to a question put to him by a lawyer. He says:

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*

And secondly,

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

It is at the same time a surprisingly simple yet difficult command – "Keep on loving God and those around you come what may". And in the time of Covid that's just what we have to do; it isn't easy and we won't be perfect at it. Just as throughout the story of the Bible God's people failed him time and again, so we shall fail. But we must never give up trying – because our Lord will never give up on us, and he'll give us the strength we need for our journey.



The Collect which comes at the end of this Sunday's service gives us that hope:

*God of all grace,
your Son Jesus Christ fed the hungry
with the bread of his life and the word of his kingdom:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your true and living bread;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. Amen.*

Keep Going! And the Lord be with you.

Ian Coomber