

WELCOME 6th October 2024 – 20th Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Psalm 1 & Romans 1:1-2

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... The song says, "**We** are one, but we are many..." except when we're not...Not one. Not one at all but **MANY**...many competing worldviews, many positions, many special interests, many groups. The greatest obvious force in our world today is division which sees varied points of view or groups of people not as simple disagreements, or as just different but as enemies...to be silenced crushed & vanquished.

Instead of being drawn together we become unable to relate to anyone the least bit different from us. People we desire to engage w/ get pushed further away & we become anxious, isolated, lonely, & empty. *EVERYONE VS EVERYONE*

But Jesus comes to us & steps into our brokenness to restore us from the inside out & unleash his reconciling love & restoring hope into the world, bringing gospel transformation that is authentic, inclusive, & lasting...eternally lasting.

For Christ himself is our peace.

He united Jews & Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. Eph 2:14

which means...

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. *Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Rom 12:2 (Msg)*

When every force around you says divide & conquer, Christ calls "*Be one in me*"

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father you made us for relationship with you, with one another & to love & steward your creation. In folly we tried to take what was not ours but by Christ you have reclaimed us from ourselves & have given us back to one another.

Shape our hearts to abound in steadfast love & faithfulness toward you, toward each other, & to those who are yet distant from your saving embrace. Unite us one to another unburdened by the pressures & forces that would tear us apart & make our oneness a sign of your presence in us...we pray as we gather now, in Jesus' name...Amen.

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. What is one social or cultural change you've experienced in the last 20-25 years? How has that impacted your life? I'm thinking *challenged* you in some way
2. Where do you find your faith in Christ most challenged by the culture of the 21st century? How are you responding to that challenge?

Let's pray... Father, I pray to you in the name & by the authority of your Son, Jesus. Bless us as your people, sent into your world with a word of resurrection hope & eternal joy. Use us to bless others to your glory in ways we never dreamed possible. Lord Jesus Christ, you are the one who will judge the world with justice by granting all who believe in you your righteousness. You are the One who defeated death forgave our sin & crushed evil & our rebellion by your cross & resurrection. Strengthen our trust & lead us to rest & peace in you alone. Teach us by your Holy Spirit, what is true, what to do, & who you want us to reach with your word in our daily living. We ask all this & whatever you know we need but would never ask...for your name's sake. Amen

20 Pentecost '24 B – PRESSURE POINTS: SOCIAL PRESSURE

If you could climb into a **time** machine & go back...to the time of Abraham & Sarah. Sit down by their tents in Ur of the Chaldeans...share some roasted goat, a skin of wine & chat for a while, about them, their nearest neighbours & the travelers they'd met out in the desert trade routes...You'd discover everyone had a **god**. They used varied names & performed different rituals but **EVERYONE** lived fully aware of greater powers surrounding them. They knew humans were not the "be all/end all" of life. Life did not originate when they woke up but there were bigger forces managing the universe...they existed under a greater canopy of power. **Joshua** said to the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham & Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River, & they worshiped other gods. But I took your ancestor Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates & led him into the land of Canaan. - Josh 24:2-3 Until Yahweh took hold of Abe, he had a different god; like everyone else. Tribal – Locational - Functional

You know what...If you went back to the banks of the Murrumbidgee River & had a chat w/ an early Wiradjuri family...you'd see the same thing. They were not godless people. They too acknowledged spiritual powers to which they lived responsive & accountable. The rituals & names would have been different from Abe/Sarah...but for most of human life however many yrs humans have walked this earth...the great majority of it, we've sensed the presence & power of some god at work in the world. Scholars call that the **1st** culture. Everyone has a god. Everyone lives w/ some awareness of transcendent power greater than humans. Temples. Idols. Sacred mounds. Rituals. Spheres of influence. For however many yrs humans have walked this earth...majority of folks have lived in worship of some "god."

Into **THAT** world, Jesus **is** born. He was born into the Jewish faith in Yahweh; the God of Abraham/Sarah, Isaac/Rebekkah, Jacob/Rachel/Leah...into the lineage of David & the promises to their ancestors & descendants. But it was still a 1st culture world. The Romans, like the Greeks ^{b/4} them, worshipped many gods. Judaism & then Christianity were lived among many faiths. Everyone had a god. But if you jumped in that **time** machine again & made a small leap to about 400 **AD** ≈ 300 yrs after the NT was written you'd see something completely different.

Oh there were still hundreds of competing beliefs/faiths...but faith in **f** was becoming dominant on the spiritual/cultural landscape in the Western world & for a while the Eastern. For ≈ 1600 yrs, faith in Christ would shape human life around the world. Things we take for granted emerged only from the atmosphere of Xnty as the world's most influential faith. Universal free education. Care for the poor & elderly. Health care. Human rights/dignities. The inherent value of the individual.

Stewardship of the environment. All grew from the soil of Christian faith. Those same scholars call **that** a **2nd** culture. You & I have lived almost all our lives in that 2nd culture where faith in **Christ** was assumed & its values, ethics, morals, patterns, & principles guided societies around the world.

But climb back in that **time** machine to today maybe a bit ^{b/4} & some of those cultural & societal shifts we mentioned earlier have created what scholars now call a **3rd** culture where many are **reluctant** to acknowledge God...in any form. Truth...what's real...is found in my lived experience even if my lived experience contradicts yours or flies in the face of what we can demonstrate scientifically. Truth originates not in God or even in objective facts, but in my self-expression & self-understanding. What is of utmost importance in our 21st century 3rd culture? **Self-expression self-fulfillment – personal** autonomy & authenticity...as fluid flexible or fleeting as those things might be. Today for me might not be like tomorrow might not be like the day after. But since I am my own source of truth...I am the decider of what's real/authentic for me; who are you to question?

This 3rd culture is precisely what Paul told Timothy to expect: **You should know this, Timothy in the last days there will be very difficult times. People will love only themselves & their money. They will be boastful & proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, & ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving & unforgiving; they will slander others & have no self-control. They will be cruel & hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up w/ pride, & love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. 2 Tim 3:1-4 Stay away from people like that! – But what DO you do? Cave?**

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God & Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living & the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favourable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, & encourage your people w/ good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound & wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires & will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth & chase after myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, & fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

– 2 Tim 4:1-5 Again let's ask, in this 3rd culture, **What DO you do? – Psalm 1**

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around w/ sinners, or join in w/ mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, & they prosper in all they do. Or as Paul wrote: **Don't** become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it w/out even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. **What DO you do?**

Cling to the church not the culture – Make worship your non-negotiable highest value. Marinade your life in God’s word among God’s people. Here’s what we know...84% of everyday Australians have no living relationship w/ Christ or his church...& the vast majority of that 84% your not-yet-Christian friends will not start their journey toward Christ from w/in here...this is not where a not-yet-believer will just wander in & feel comfortable...but you, planted like a tree along a riverbank can bear fruit into the life of someone who isn’t here. You can offer an insight, experience of Christ’s work in you...as Luther said, **“One** beggar telling another beggar where to find food.” The church is a place where I belong despite myself, have value I didn’t earn & dignity & respect I can’t find anywhere else. **Cling to the church not the culture**

Charles Spurgeon once said, **“I** believe one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.” Spurgeon died in 1892. One of the tragedies we face in 2024...**Who** do you trust to tell you the truth? We all know what **“spin”** is & we’ve heard the words **“fake news”** but do we know w/ 100% certainty who is doing which when? No...we don’t. Hannah Arendt was a German/Jewish historian/philosopher. She lived through both World Wars & understood political lying probably better than most...She said lying is not aimed at making people believe **the lie**, but at making sure no one believed anything. As lies multiply, the result is not that the lie is believed but that people lose faith in truth & are at risk to believing anything. (GK Chesterton). **What DO you do?**
Cling to the church not the culture

Proclaim Christ & no other word...21st century 3rd culture is drowning in opinions, advice, experts, gurus, podcasts...what self-help books were to the 20th cent podcast is now. *Hey Siri/Alexa/Google...*3rd culture is awash in information & none of it offers true life transformation toward the good, true, & lasting. What’d Paul tell Timothy? **Preach** the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favourable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, & encourage your people with good teaching... you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don’t be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News... or to the church in Corinth **For** I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, & him crucified. – 1 Cor 2:2 Tx Pr Jonathan Dodson says, **“When** we stand up & proclaim God’s word as true & authoritative, we challenge idols, & behind every idol, there is a power, a satanic power, that Christ has already shamed through the victory of the cross.”

Go back to Psalm 1... Oh, the joys/blessedness of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand w/ sinners, join w/ mockers. But delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day & night... trees...bear fruit...never wither...**For** the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. To say to someone & I know you can because you’ve said it to me, **There** was this time when I was _____ & Jesus _____

Sam Alberry Most important question in the universe is not “What does the Bible say about sexuality?” but “Is Jesus who he claimed to be?” You know he is in a way no one else does Proclaim Christ & no other word **What DO you do?**

Practice the promises...In his commentary on the book of Revelation David Campbell writes, **“Revelation** is not a handbook to last-day events. It is a pastoral letter written to Christians of every age & generation on how to live lives faithful to God & Christ in the midst of all the challenges a hostile pagan world throws at them.” We talked about this some last week...but the NT is written **in a** “Since/therefore” mindset. *Since you have been raised w/ Christ...Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves now live like that.* Obedience isn’t some grudging drudgery but a joy-filled response to being embraced by Christ’s death/rez/eternal Kingdom while you were still an alienated enemy of the Father...Live fully trusting Christ’s presence in every moment dwelling w/in you...Christ’s provision for every need that arises...& Christ’s power for every challenge coming at you. Practice the promise *“don’t worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you...for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”* Practice the promise that *“God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.”* that *“He who did not spare his own Son won’t he also give us everything else”* that as you *“Seek the Kingdom of God & his righteousness above all else, he will give you everything you need.”* British Cricketer/missionary CT Studd - **“The** best cure for discouragement or anxiety is another daring plunge of faith.” Practice the promises - Proclaim Christ & no other word - **Cling to the church not the culture** **It’s there again/again...**

Jesus comes to us & steps into our brokenness to restore us from the inside out & unleash his reconciling love & restoring hope into the world, bringing gospel transformation that is authentic, inclusive, & lasting...eternally lasting..

For Christ himself is our peace.

He united Jews & Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. Eph 2:14

which means...

Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Rom 12:2 (Msg)

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TAKE IT HOME: (take a bit & share with your neighbour)

Where my faith is most challenged this week I will _____

LET’S PRAY...ON WELCOME PAGE