

Sermon- are you worried?

31st August 2014

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When preparing every service, I am mindful we shouldn't have hymn sandwiches and that some of our congregation like a good sing and others don't- just as some people say we don't hear the word of the Lord enough and others say too much emphasis is on the bible. There is no way any of us can please all the people all the time so today I hope some of you will be okay with the content of the service. We are looking at priorities and does it really matter where the hymns are and where the prayers are? Of course it does, because the details make up the whole just as we are whole people and not just disciples. We are complex creatures and the Lord knows this quite well!

I am reminded of the college professor who wanted to impress on his students the importance of prioritising their lives. He used the example of a storage jar that he proceeded to fill with golf balls. The students agreed the jar was full so he then poured in some smaller pebbles that filled the gaps. Again the students agreed the jar was full- so he poured sand in the smaller gaps and again they agreed the jar was full. He then topped it up with chocolate milk to their surprise.

He began by saying that our first priorities in our life are like golf balls, the family, God, neighbours and health. Then the smaller pebbles will be our work, our homes, our car, hobbies and interests, our jobs at Church and our voluntary work, holidays.

Finally the sand represents the dull, boring minutiae of life, the cooking, ironing, washing, shopping, cleaning, reading, doing nothing, meetings, minutes of meetings, agendas, car cleaning, mowing the lawn etc., I'm sure you could all add to the list of the smallest stuff that always seems to need doing.

Just as we know some of the sand is essential, we mustn't get bogged down by the sand in our lives and we must still prioritise the golf balls.

Some of us can be workaholics so a balance needs to be struck, we can't have too many golf balls because the jar just won't hold them so some of our golf

balls have to be downgraded to pebbles. If you put sand in first, there will be no room for anything else. Set your priorities as everything else is sand.

For your interest in case it is bothering you, when asked by the students what the chocolate milk represented, the professor said- No matter how full your life may seem, there is always room for chocolate! I think the professor must have been a lady somehow!

Remember, every day is a gift and the quality of your life is your gift to yourself.

We can now relate to the readings we have had this morning and I'm going to refer to the most difficult one first- not in any particular order as they are all important and you must decide for yourself, which is the most important or the most difficult for you to attach yourself to- or all of them or none of them or in a different order- we are all different- our relationship with God is different, our own priorities are different from the person next to us even within families.

Our psalm reading states that God is our refuge and our strength, he is with us, an ever present help in trouble and I think we have difficulty in off loading onto God some of our troubles and the things that concern us. We worry and stew on things instead of opening up and sharing our concerns.

I think very generally about our world situation. How can the Kingdom Of God ever be present throughout the world when there is so much strife, when our faith is tested and our fellow Christians suffer and are persecuted. When nature obliterates whole villages and wipes out whole families, we find it difficult to relate this to the love of God. It boils down to trust and faith and hope.

We trust God, we have faith in him and we hope. This reading is also one of contrasts, asking us to not fear even though the earth gives way, the waters roar and foam- much activity and can be upsetting to think of it all- but then in verse 10 he asks us to be still, to be calm, and know that he is God. He realises our lives are busy and there are stresses and strains in every avenue and path of our life but he is asking us to take time out- like today and now in this service- to become calm, to ponder, reflect, think and eventually to tell him of our concerns and fears and let him have them. Just let go a little bit for a little time,

to take refuge in his strength and then when it is time to return to the mele that is our usual world, we are little calmer, a little more able to cope.

Our reading from Genesis introduces us to Joseph. Joseph the youngest son of Jacob, loved by God, was even more loved by his father- much to the disgust of his brothers. They looked on him with hate, envy and jealousy and for his father to provide him with a rich ornate robe, was really the last straw. Our reading is short and to the point but reading on in Genesis the unfolding of Joseph's story, you can see how his dreams angered his brothers but they were short sighted and did not relate any of the events to their relationship with God.

Had they trusted that all that Joseph dreamt had a base in God, perhaps they would have reacted differently. But we are all human and we all react to news and events differently. Of course had they acted differently, the story would not have unfolded and Joseph wouldn't have ended up as he did- in charge of Egypt and able to provide his father and their whole family with lands, security, food and shelter when there was a dreadful long lasting famine in the lands.

Many times we must wonder why things happen to us, to others, all is in God's plan for us, he adapts his plans when us humans, with our free will, decide ourselves what is best and make a mess of it and he then rescues us.

We've all had days when nothing goes right and then when we least expect it, something good happens that restores our faith and hope in God- a wonderful sunset at the end of a tormented journey with fractious children, jammed roads and short tempers- a long day at work and then come home to a cooked meal and a welcoming sofa!

We need to trust our God to do the best for us and he does- it is usually us that mucks it up- some other human has decided to dig up the roads we want to use and then we get diverted, some other human has a car that breaks down and causes a tailback that results in chaos and more short tempers!

There is always a silver lining, sometimes it is obvious and other times it can be some time after the event when the meaning or the plan becomes clear.

Coming to this part of the world from Lancashire was never in my plans for the future I had in mind, but God sent me here and it wasn't until I started my training as a local preacher I realised I was in the right place at the right time- my daughter would agree as this is where she has found the love of her life.

God has plans for all of us, at all times in our lives and for this we must be thankful, adoring and praising our Lord and showing others by the example of our lives that following Jesus has its rewards- just as Joseph trusted and had faith in God to rescue him from the well his brothers threw him down, from the slave traders who sold him on, from Potifah's wife who had designs on him, to Pharoah who rewarded him and put him in charge of the whole of Egypt.

Do read Joseph's story again, it has lots to offer us to trust in God.

This takes us on to the reading from Luke to reinforce the message to get our priorities right and to trust in God. Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear. God knows every inch of us, inside and out, he knows what we need, he knows our worries and concerns and he needs us to give them to him, to prioritise our lives and get things in perspective. We are supremely important to him, he will look after us even if at times we think his plans for us aren't right. With our free will, we struggle to accept his plans and sometimes rail against them but he is infinitely patient and we will come round to his way of thinking eventually because we know he has our best interests at heart.

If our life is settled and there is no change in it at all from day to day, we fool ourselves. We ourselves change every day, we get a day older and a day nearer to being with our Lord and we should celebrate each and every day and part of this is to try and not worry.

Some folk find it hard to understand why I don't find food exciting- I like plain ordinary food, sausages and mash, steak and kidney pie, roast beef. All straight forward and not mucked about with- but some people live for their meals-

planning, buying, preparing, cooking, serving and finally eating it- only to have to wash up afterwards- I really can't see the fuss and find shopping tedious- I would much rather be gardening than cooking- I really don't worry about food. There are many other day to day things we worry about, will the bus turn up, have I got enough in the bank to buy petrol today, what dress shall I wear on Saturday- we really need to get our priorities right and then all the small things will really and truly fall into place.

I've started to think about my health and fitness, my hearing is suspect- so my son tells me- my blood pressure is suspect so the doctor says, climbing into the loft is a pain and my glasses aren't working properly but I try not to worry about my healthy future because whatever happens, God will be there to help me through- to help us all in our advancing years, how do we meet that challenge of not worrying about the future.

In verse 31 of the Luke reading, Seek his Kingdom and these things will be given to you as well. We are all reassured that to follow him will bring us right rewards and he will look after our future for us if we follow him. He tells us- where your treasure is, there your heart will be also- we need to turn that round and put our heart with him and he will be our treasure! I recommend you read the next verses from 35 to 40 for more guidance and advice.

We all have our talents so we need to put them to good use. Whatever they are, we need to use the ones we all have to join together as disciples and the family of God to be cohesive as a church but not exclusive. We can all pray and we can all listen whatever our health, we can all read and watch wherever we are in our journey with God.

Let us put God at the centre of our lives, pray to him and give him our worries and concerns, trust in Him and we will be rewarded.

Prayers of reflection and challenge

Lord, help us to prioritise our lives so you are at the centre. Help us to pray, to give you our concerns so we worry a little less, help us to trust you, to obey your commandment to love each other and to listen so we live our lives as you would have us do.

Amen