

Sermon

2Corinthians 5.6-20

In the name of God, Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, Amen.

Welcome to winter! This week we had the coldest June day in 5 years. Winter is a time of rugging up and trying to keep warm, just like in church, a time when we might slow down, when the plants around us enter a dormant stage in preparation for renewal in spring. Today we continue with our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians with most of chapter five, that continues Paul's theme of renewal and faith which we have heard about over the last two weeks, with his use of the metaphors of "treasure in clay jars" and the contrasting earthly tent and eternal dwelling. As I pondered the readings this week, I was struck by Paul's comment that "we walk by faith, not by sight". It's absolutely true isn't it? Our faith is in the eternal, unseen God. Just like the understanding and hope that Spring will inevitably come after winter. God reveals this eternal glory in the light of the sun, moon or stars, or the beauty of the light streaming through the clouds as we drive along the highway. It makes my soul leap with joy and awe to see this, and I am reminded of God's eternal presence in my life.

So today, we are continuing our exploration of God's presence in our lives and the impact of our faith, what our faith means to us in the way we present to the world, to our friends and family, to our work colleagues and local community. But first a story drawn from my own life.

I'm not sure about you, but until my 40s I was the sort of Anglican that went to work, that socialised, that engaged in the community, and no one would have known I was a Christian. My family knew, they always considered me the religious one! But something happened in my 40s. In the aftermath of the painful divorce from the father of my children, I was invited to go on a Cursillo weekend. For those of you who don't know, Cursillo is a three day program of Christian immersion, a short course in understanding our faith and how it can make a difference in our lives. It had a profound impact on me and since doing that course, I have been an out and proud Christian, happy to tell anyone, anywhere about how my faith makes a difference to

my life. Cursillo even led me to study and when I was 48 I enrolled in a Graduate diploma of theology to explore and try to understand more about the faith which was so significant in my life. And study led to discernment, and discernment led to ordination and here we are 6 and half years later in Lara and Little River.

And I tell this story because I think it illustrates Paul's writing today when he says, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" Last week, we talked about renewal of our inner nature day by day, in contrast to the decay and even death of our outer body, but this week Paul extends that concept of renewal even further to mean recreation. In Christ we are recreated. Accepting Jesus into our lives gives us a whole new opportunity to live for the one reconciling God. The God who is reconciled to us despite our ongoing flawed natures, our pride, stubbornness, arrogance and any other characteristics that we might be less than happy with. And Paul goes to great length to help us understand how that reconciliation comes about. Let's have a look. Paul starts at Verse 6 of Chapter 5:

"So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."

So this is one of the outcomes of faith. We are confident, we do have confidence. Note that Paul repeats this. And he continues on from chapter four with the concept of our bodies, our clay jars, and what is seen and unseen. Here he says, while we are at home in our bodies, we are away from the Lord, we can't see him. We walk by faith not by sight. And it is this faith that drives our preferences and our actions. Because of our faith, we look forward to the day when we are at home with the Lord but, even then, whether we are at home with the Lord or still at home in our bodies, we want to please him. And this gets right into the theology that was so crucial to the Reformation. We don't do good works to earn our way into heaven. We do good because of our love of God and our desire to please, to live

the way that Jesus taught us. And Paul reiterates this point when he continues:

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.”

Our love of Christ, our faith in Christ, is what motivates us. and in a singularly succinct explanation of the cross, Paul says he is convinced that one died for all. I love this statement. Jesus died not just for a special group, or a particular group, Jesus died for all. The opportunity is there for all people to have faith, to believe in Jesus, to be recreated as someone who no longer lives just for themselves but for Jesus. Living the way Jesus taught us through so much of his ministry and his parables.

And then Paul says “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” This is the idea that we die in Christ to be recreated anew. You might recall the statement that is said in the Baptism ceremony.

“Baptism with water signifies the cleansing from sin that Jesus’ death makes possible, and the new life that God gives us through the Holy Spirit.”

We are reconciled with God, we are made one with God through the death and then the resurrection of Jesus. And this is Paul’s next point.

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”

Isn’t this beautiful? God isn’t counting our trespasses and sins when we are reconciled to God through Christ. When we are recreated into something new. And furthermore, God is entrusting this message of reconciliation, this message of hope, this message of faith, to us. To all of us – not just the vicar! Paul says “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making

his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

This is the nub. Faith in what we cannot see leads to new life in Christ and reconciliation with God, and our role in this faith filled existence is to be ambassadors for Christ. How can you all be ambassadors for Christ? At my ordination the Archbishop told us:

You are to be an ambassador of Christ, serving God as you serve others in Jesus’ name.

Proclaim the good news of God’s love, so that many may be moved to faith and repentance, and hearts be opened to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly in the presence of God.

Let the transforming love of Jesus be known to all among whom you live and work.

Strengthen the faithful, teach the young, search out the careless and indifferent.

Encourage the members of Christ’s body by word and example, ministering among the sick, the needy and all who are oppressed or in trouble.

But Paul is telling us all to be ambassadors for Christ! I’m sure that there is something in this list of actions that you can be part of. You don’t need a theology degree to let the transforming love of Jesus be known to all among whom you live and work, and we can always be encouraging of each other. As we come up to our Alpha season do pray and think about how you can be involved and who you can invite to be part of God’s transforming love.

Let us pray. Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks that you walk with us throughout our life journeys, up the hills and into the valleys, transforming us and recreating us in your love. We pray that we can know your presence in our lives and be your ambassadors. Give us the courage and desire to spread the knowledge of your love. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.