

Holy Living

Sermon Message on 1 Peter excerpt St James Evensong March 8th 2015

Keynote Bible Reading: 1 Peter 1.13 – 25

The paragraph heading in my Bible of tonight's New Testament reading is '*A call to holy living*'. Thus coming to prepare for this sermon message it seemed apt to give it a title: Holy Living'. Then to discern what that might mean for us in 'holy living'. As one might expect Peter in his letter spells out the implications of what that might mean, as he penned the letter for the believers of the early church.

The first aspect is very 'Lenten' in its instruction – and it is thus appropriate as we are now well into the Lenten season. So '*prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves...*' What I especially note is the 'prepare your minds....' How well do we do this before we act or speak? Here's an example – a few years ago I attended a seminar introducing me to 'self-talk'. I sometimes see this when driving my car and other drivers while not using cell-phones nevertheless seem to be talking aloud. Perhaps they are seeking to sort something out in their mind. The lecturer further went on to suggest we should note the distinction between negative self-talk and positive. The negative is that where a person puts themselves down (as feeling unworthy) and with consequential low self-esteem. An example of positive self-talk is the prodigal son seeking to get out of the bad place he was in. Note his resolve first to himself: 'I will go,..... and I will say....' Furthermore from my experience in healing ministry this attitude of the mind seems to be very important – as Jesus indicated to the man at the Pool: 'Do you want to be well? Or more accurately from the older translation:

'Wilt thou be made whole?' This would seem to seek to elicit a positive mindset to get well. So then we are to 'prepare our minds for action.'

Then also comes a word which occurs frequently in Lenten context, of '*discipline*'. That's what Peter writes – 'discipline yourselves.' It is helpful to think of this not in terms of punishment but as being related to another common word in biblical context, that of disciple – best translated as learner. True an amount of discipline or rule can be helpful in achieving what one wants to learn. Years of study taught me that. Yet how easy it is to neglect the discipline we might seek in the Lenten season - then to continue it through the year. I have found it helpful not so much in what one might give up, but rather in what one might take on to come closer in relation to Jesus through a Lenten discipline.

Peter then continues in introducing the theme of holy living for the reader - to be obedient, and that means putting aside what desires one had in ignorance. Don't be conformed to them is the message. I apply this and seek to gauge it by my conscience. And for sure there's been times past when my conscience has been 'pricked'. There's a song of which the words are a reminder: 'There's been times when I've turned from his presence, and I've walked other paths, other ways. But I've called on his name in the dark of my shame, and his mercy is gentle as silence'. Obedience then is 'key'.

2) A paragraph follows this in which Peter goes into some explanation of the origins of the *concept of holiness* through Hebrew practices of their ancestors and especially of sacrifice, with its beginnings in ways to appease the gods, to be restored to the divine, after disobedience. He puts it also in cosmic context in that the divine purpose of Christ was even before the foundation of the world, and into a future more to be revealed at the end of the ages. If we paraphrased this it would signify this has deep spiritual significance in God's purposes for humanity.

William Barclay in his commentary goes back to origins of the word holy (*hagios*), it was 'being different'. Then it acquired a spiritual significance, being saintly. Thus the Jewish Temple was holy, the Sabbath was to be holy, and Christians were different by their life lived as being holy. There's a sense in this also of reverence. I remember a song comes to mind: Pure and holy I would be, worthy of your love for me.'

By now we are getting close may I suggest to this 'being holy'. How might we aspire to this? And what does this 'holiness' entail? One might think immediately of a monk sequestered in a monastery at prayer continually, or like Anna who the gospel tells us spent all day every day in prayer. Reality would suggest we'll never get like that, and indeed don't need to. Let's note however the 'key verse' – 'He who called you is holy, be holy in all your conduct, for it is written "You shall be holy as I the Lord am holy." We may aspire then to 'being holy' by our living. 'The Message' paraphrase expresses it admirably – 'Your life is a journey you must travel – with a deep consciousness of God.' That's the essence of 'being holy'.

3) This leads to a third aspect of holiness and that it in *relationship with other people* and by implication the believers. Peter is suggesting as one seeks to exercise this holy life and aware of its theological significance, then to apply it in relationships. Thus 'to have genuine mutual love, to love one another deeply from the heart.' (1.22). What's this – a blend of the Greek *philia*, brotherly or sisterly love, and *agape* – that love Jesus showed in great depth in his earthly ministry and encouraged his disciples to be in relationship in the church community. Thus having genuine mutual love and loving one another deeply from the heart.' Barclay describes this as 'the life that is made beautiful by the love of God who gave it birth.' I trust we seek this in relationships. My own understanding of this is that the two may blend – the *philia* and the *agape*. Just as an example of this – last week I attended a reunion of my class of '55 in the school attended some 60 years ago. I was looking forward to meeting up with school friends of those days – the majority I hadn't seen since leaving school, my having then attended university in Dunedin. The camaraderie was really exciting, meeting up again, seeing our photos from playing sport, and for some the scholastic achievement with their names on honours boards in the School Hall. We listened to the headmaster tell of 'the Grammar way' and the seeking to instil values we were taught way back. All that was very much the *philia*. I wondered about the *agape*, and it was interesting how it came to light. In conversation we shared our respective occupations of the last 40 years or so. On hearing what I had chosen some declared their active Christian allegiance, and it was interesting with them to sense *agape* in the also in the relationship.

'Being holy' then is something to which we can aspire, lifelong. It is acquired on the journey each of us travel, with a deep consciousness of God.'

So it is as Peter concludes the section – it is 'good news that was announced to you'. Thanks be to God!