

Sowing Seeds of Love and Compassion

Sermon of Sunday June 13th 2021 by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, St James and All Saints

Keynote Bible passages: 2 Corinthians 5.16 – 21, Mark 4 26 – 34

The theme of this sermon is from the collect of the day – ‘*Sowing seeds of love and compassion.*’ Please keep it in mind.

Year by year our leaders have got into the practice of delivering a ‘State of the Nation’ address. This morning the sermon is similar, only the challenge being a ‘*State of the Planet*’ theme. First it is to know how we measure up – to this end may I suggest 3 scriptural principles by which to consider it. And to conclude, what are we doing about it?

Thus: ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together with it’ (1 Cor 12.25).

2nd ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ (Romans 4.23)

3rd ‘By grace you have been saved through faith.’ (Ephesians 2.8)

Three – and they are quite easy to remember.

Now let us apply these to living in this world. First will be ‘*Climate change*’, then ‘human relationships’ and third of the church, the body of Christ.

- 1) *Climate change*: While we might enjoy those balmy summer days, this is contributing to ‘global warming’. I prefer to name it for what is happening on Planet Earth - from burning fossil fuels thus polluting the atmosphere. Every time we turn on the ignition in our car (unless it is electric), poisonous gases are released into the atmosphere. That can be regarded as a sin against creation – whereby ‘God saw what he had made, and it was very good.’ To think thousands upon thousands of vehicles and are doing the same. In recently changing my car I looked for one with lower emissions than the previous one. Where there are small errands rather than take the car, to cycle or walk. If you’re a meat eater, have you thought about the poisonous methane gas breathed out by the animal that’s become the meat now on the table?

Then the latest public revelation this week in Aotearoa New Zealand of significant use of burning coal to supplement shortages of electricity needs. Quoting the article: ‘NZ has significantly increased its use of coal for gas, despite its status as the worst’ most polluting fossil fuel on the Planet. In the first three months of this year e same amount of coal was used to generate electricity as in all of 2016 and 2017 combined. This harshly contrasts with the comment made this week by the Prime Minister that climate action is a matter of life or death.’ Surely there could be more investment in solar and wind turbine power generation. And for us, to economise in our use of electricity.

Then there’s the matter of *waste* – and plastics in particular. The Summerset retirement village has 4 wheelie bins for different types of waste. 2 were smaller (glass, and plastics and aluminium) and 2 for general waste and for paper and cardboard. The management had to change the plastics one for a larger wheelie bin as it was getting full so soon. Thankfully some is recycled but the rest will be

deposited in a landfill to last for how long. It would seem this also is a sin against creation – that which we are called to nurture and care for.

You'll remember our country was shown up in this with a storm where a West Coast river in flood diverted in and through a landfill – and the waste was spread across the beaches up and down the coast. So let's try to reduce plastics especially single use items. As we consider these in the context of living a Christian lifestyle we can be mindful of the declaration of scripture: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' and 'whoever among you has not sinned let them throw the first stone.' Applying the third principle 'You have been saved' in this context it means to be trying to do something about it, though its not easy in our present culture.

On the issue of climate change then I'm left with the statement of Bishop Justin: 'Climate change is a spiritual issue.'

2) A second major in State of the Planet is aspect is of *human relationships*.

Let us take examples from the international scene. First ravages and suffering from the pandemic *Covid 19*. Who of us sits in our lounge in the evening watching the TV news and seeing the suffering of those affected in 3rd world countries, bodies lying around crowded hospital floors? Yet doing nothing. So while many of us wait for the Covid inoculation we can be consoled that there's others – 'poor nations' who need it more far than we do.

A second consideration is the plight of *migrants* – people seeking a better life leaving their homes in Africa to try to get to Europe. Many from South America travel through Mexico seeking to get to the US. Some die on the way or get blocked at the border. That says much about the *inequality* that exists between nations and consequently more suffering.

Closer to home - think of our trans-Tasman neighbour country not knowing what to do with unwanted immigrants and criminals shipping them off to isolated islands offshore, there to be forgotten about. Isn't that history repeating itself as did England in the 1800's exporting convicts to 'out of sight, out of mind', to Australia?

Nor should our country be self-satisfied – consider the number presently serving time in prison. What's wrong in our society that prompts that to be occurring? A few weeks back there were reports of pregnant women in prison being handcuffed. That is surely inhumane, and hopefully the negative publicity has meant it stopped happening.

3) Then a consideration closer to home. Churches and individuals have been facing *situations of abuse* especially of children and young people. Thus it has prompted wide-ranging enquiry and concern. If we thought that was 'out of sight, out of mind', being 'historic' instances, publicity of the last week reminded us it has a presentness of 'here and now.' Thus bringing a mix of emotions, from grief and sadness to anger and confusion. For others affected similarly, triggering memories of what happened in their situation – the past yet still there in present memory.

How might one respond? please think back to those scriptural principles outlined – 'if one member suffers, all suffer together'.

Then there's that second principle, lest we be judgmental – 'All have sinned and fall short.....'

When have there been times when we have hurt another, or been hurt? Hurting words and hurting actions. That's about human relationships. Furthermore, it may well raise difficult issues of *forgiveness* – both being forgiven and forgiving others. We can remember Jesus' own suffering abuse, and his words of forgiveness.

So to the 3rd – 'By grace you have been saved'. What can we do about it? If it's any consolation the early church had its issues of relationship. Hence the need for St Paul to address concerns including in the church at Corinth, the focus of today's reading. Quoting from the letter: 'Here we are then speaking for Christ as though God was making his appeal through us....Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor 5)

That is timeless – as God's grace is received so also healing. Christ is sharing in our grief and sadness. Jesus knew sin, and God's grace has been poured out.

This grace is expressed in the prayer collect, 'sowing seeds of love and compassion'. 'By grace you are saved.' Quoting again, 'The God who said, 'Out of darkness the light shall shine, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ.'

Our parish has recently engaged in MAP- ing Mission Action planning. Today's reading can help us apply a principle – of God's grace, being in a ministry of reconciliation. St Paul affirms this, calling his readers '*ambassadors for Christ*'. As it applies to us, that's both a privilege and responsibility, toward fellow members of the church and in the community.

In concluding then let us endeavour to sow seeds of love and compassion in a hurting and suffering world. Here again the prayer intent of the Collect: God of all goodness you give life and growth to all creation. May we flourish and grow and in turn sow seeds of love and compassion, justice and truth, hope and faith through Jesus Christ the life-giver. Amen.