

2 May 2021

Easter 5

Opening Words

One of the lectionary Bible readings for this week is later verses in John chapter 15.

In THE MESSAGE it says that Jesus wants us to feel at home with him:

"I am the vine, you are the branches ... if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon." (John 15:5,7)

What does 'making yourself at home with God' mean to you?

Is it making a cup of tea and sitting down at the kitchen table to have a nice chat?

Is it kicking your shoes off and curling up on the sofa to read a good book?

Is it going for a stroll in the garden - or having a kick about on the lawn?

Is it opening a beer and settling down to watch the football?

The Lord is waiting for us to spend time with him:

"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." (verse 4)

"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love." (verse 9)

If you would like to, you could pause this and make a cup of tea or coffee and sit down with a cuppa as we spend some time with God. In a moment we're going to continue worshipping God through song, but first I want you to imagine yourself 'at home' having a chat with God right now. Tell him about all the things that are on your mind - all the things that may be stopping you relaxing in his presence and concentrating on what God wants to say to you.

Lord, I pray that you will release all of us right now from anything that is holding us back from making ourselves at home in your presence and praising you. Amen.

Bible Reading**Psalm 22.25-31**

I will praise you among all the people. I will fulfil my vows in the presence of those who worship you. The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will raise him. Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy. The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to him. People from every nation will bow down before him. For the Lord is king! He rules all the nations. Let the rich of the earth feast and worship. Let all mortals – those born to die – bow down in his presence. Future generations will also serve him. Our children will hear about the wonders of the Lord. His righteous acts will be told to those yet unborn They will hear about everything he has done. New Living Translation

Bible Reading**Acts 8.26-40**

As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him: ‘Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So, he did, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopian, who was a eunuch of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was on his way home. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. The Holy Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and walk along beside the carriage.’ Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah; so he asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ The man replied, ‘How can I, when there is no one to instruct me?’ and he begged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.’ The eunuch asked Philip. ‘Was Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?’ So, Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus . . .

Reflection

Did you receive a letter in the post this week addressed to Occupier? It was from Kevin and included a hand-written note about Jesus identifying a website with a video giving an account of why Jesus died. I was amazed that someone would have spent so much money to send round this letter to everyone in St Ives, if that is what he did. The letter did not identify that he was a Jehovah Witness, but the website did. I may not agree with all their theology – but one thing the Jehovah Witnesses are amazingly diligent about

is, their boldness to knock on doors to tell people about Jesus. I wonder how many people opened the letter, read it and chucked it in the blue bin, and how many might have looked at the website?

We as Reformed mainline Christians, unlike them, struggle to talk about our faith, to express what we believe and why it makes a difference to our lives. We are fearful of trivializing our faith by trite sayings. We are hesitant to 'cast our pearls before swine' – those who would disrespect what we consider special and holy. Nor do we want to embarrass ourselves or others by intruding where we are not wanted. The thing for us to think about is, how *do* we appropriately and sensitively share our faith with others?

I think Acts 8 gives us an interesting example from the early church to model. Firstly, the follower of Jesus is open to the leading of the Holy Spirit – he is not just barging in anywhere at any time. Secondly, he willing to follow where God leads – to make use of an opportunity. Thirdly he meets the Ethiopian where he was at. We know that the Ethiopian was interested and open to hearing about God because he had come from the Temple where he had gone to worship. He was a Gentile convert to Judaism from North Africa. As a Gentile and a Eunuch, he would not have been permitted to enter the Temple itself to worship with other men but would have had to stay in the outer courts with women and foreigner. The fact that he was reading the Scriptures showed that he was open to learning about God.

One of the challenging things about mission is first to get to know people, to show respect and interest in them as people, and to meet them where they are at, not where we are. It is rare to come across people reading the Scriptures in our day-to-day interactions with people in our society, however there are many ways in which the good news of God's love found in Christ relates to our everyday lives. As we go about our business, working with colleagues, going out with friends, buying groceries, visiting health clinics, going for walks, chatting to neighbours over the garden fence, playing sport, sharing similar interests with others, we get to know others and therefore can naturally share our faith with others as we experience God's blessings, peace, help, love and ongoing presence giving us strength and assurance throughout our lives.

The Eunuch was ready to receive and understand the news that Jesus had laid down his life for him and he wanted to be baptised right away. Most people take a long time to consider what they believe and have many

questions and doubts as well as times when they are open to God. We need to trust that it is God's Spirit that draws them to faith. Our part is to share the good news of God's love and to give them space to wonder and reflect. As we grow in our discipleship of Christ, we can share the journey with others, not as ones who have all the answers, but fellow travellers who are also learning to follow Christ in our lives.

Sadly, evangelism has become something like selling a product, when it should be like introducing someone to a friend of yours. The Christian faith is a living relationship with God not simply a set of beliefs to which we assent. May God help us to live out our faith in Christ through our words and actions so that others may want to learn something of the fullness of life that God in Christ brings.

Prayers of Intercession

Living God, we thank you that you love all people. Help us to show your love in our lives and help us to naturally share with others the meaning, purpose, and peace you have given us.

Loving God, how much this world needs your realm of healing, justice and love to be realised! We pray for those in parts of the world where Covid is still raging, especially India and Brazil. We pray for peace where there is conflict and violence – the Yemen, Iraq and Myanmar. We pray for those who suffer discrimination based on gender, race and social status. We pray for greater fairness and a sharing of the wealth of the world's resources. We pray for our environment and global warming. Help us to do what we can to reduce our carbon footprint and we think of the upcoming conferences where world leaders can agree to limit climate change. AMEN.