

## St Hilda's Message - 25<sup>th</sup> June 2017

### Do not be afraid

#### SCRIPTURE READINGS:

Genesis 21: 8 – 21

Romans 6: 1 - 11

Matthew 10: 24 - 39

Our readings today came together for me in the image on screen.

One of the very first times I had the privilege of leading worship it was with a small group of people, what could I offer/bring to this group? It had taken me a long time going round in circles before the answer came in the directive 'Do not be Afraid'. This fitted perfectly 😊, what really hit home was when another group member shared they had been struggling with a decision and felt these were the words they needed. And as we hear the last section of the Matthew reading "do not think that I have come to bear peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother" we realise that we can not be afraid – these are hard to hear words that don't fit with our message of a loving all caring God.

#### 1. Do not be Afraid

Our theme today is 'Do not be Afraid'. It comes up in the Collect; in the Old Testament reading we have the angel of God calling to Hagar 'Don't be afraid'; Three times in Matthew 10 verses 26, 28 & 31 and again in our Romans Reading 'death no longer has dominion over him.

The Old Testament reading is rich in imagery. The desert a place lacking refuge, dry, and full of despair and the well (once revealed) with the promise of water, life and the presence of God. (Tyndale Old Testament commentary page 141).

Jesus is giving instructions guidance to his disciples in the gospel reading, in the verses prior to this reading we have the sending out of the twelve – the situation is heating up, there were mutterings the message of Jesus was stirring up opposition, dividing families.

The threat being responded to here was on two levels;

- 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul' a warning against the upcoming violence and persecution. The establishment was being rocked by the message of Jesus and his disciples that 'God was fulfilling his promises to Israel.
- 'rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell' a warning of the powers that lure into the people of God into fighting the darkness with more darkness.

The second half of this reading is one to grapple with. There is a recognition that Jesus is bringing a new way of being God's people, that allegiance to God comes first. Division and turmoil was going to follow. I wonder how the families of the young Sister Theresa or Suzanne Aubert coped as their daughters left. How does the establishment react to groups such as Soul Survivor and Urban Vision.

From our Romans reading 'so you must also calculate yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' The NRSV uses the word 'consider' the commentary on Romans by NT Wright uses 'calculate' inviting a bookkeeping image. I work with spreadsheets and pivot tables the calculation does not change what was there but totals and tables contributed to enables us to be aware of what was true all along. As NT Wright says "the Christian stands on resurrection ground. We are not 'in Adam', we are 'in the Messiah',.....faith at this point consists, not of shutting one's eyes and trying

to believe the impossible, but opening one's eyes to the reality of Jesus and his representative death and resurrection – and to the reality of one's own standing, as a baptized and believing member of Jesus' people, those who are in the Messiah'. We need to remember who we really are, so that we can act accordingly. (NT Wright Romans p 105).

## 2. Parallel Stories

**There is an interesting parallel between the Exodus story and the story drawn by Paul in Romans.**

Exodus tells of the enslavement in Egypt. Moses was sent to lead the people out and across red sea to a new freedom. There is much muttering and grumbling before entering the land given as an inheritance. During the journey there are temptations and dangers, attacks are expected. The story is of Israel.

Romans has a similar story. Christians have come through the water of baptism and leave behind the old life of slavery & sin to a life of new freedom. We have been met by the Grace of God. When people submit to Christian baptism they die with the Messiah and are raised with him into a new life. The story here is of the whole redeemed creation.

## 3. Desert/Well

I wonder if we could go back to the Genesis reading. What are some of the ideas, concepts of the picture we carry of being in a desert place? *Slide 1:*

Wailing, persecution, no or scant refuge, despair, enslaved to sin  
Dry, arid, no food

What about if we swapped to an image of a well? Particularly in this case a well revealed'. *Slide 2*  
Water, drink, promise of life, value, love & care, value, grace, newness of life, cool, proclaim from the housetops,

## 4. Summary

The commandment 'do not be afraid' is for us. When we work through some of our own desert times, It is also for us as we are in community, let us not be afraid of discussing the hard issues and as we make decisions to "recognise who we really are and act accordingly."

I would like to finish with the following by Sarah Dylan Breuer who wrote in a blog called, sarahlaughed

"But when we take the story of God's people as our own story and when we wrestle with that story – all of it – in community, there is no prior obligation, no person, no cultural imperative, no unjust law, no earthly power that can keep us from our identity in Christ. Our freedom in Christ divides us from all that would oppress us and restores us to one another as members of one Body of Christ, called to ministry and maturity in Christ, co-heirs with the one who sets us free."

Sue Woodhouse