

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera, QLD

6<sup>th</sup> April 2025 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

**Philippians 3:3b-14**

**GRACE MATTERS**

What matters to you the most? What do you value? What do you place a high amount of worth in? As you consider that question what first comes to your mind? Is it a person or people, a material thing, a place, activity, or event? Or is it a something a bit less tangible, like knowledge, or success, or wellbeing, or reputation? And as you are thinking about that, what are the processes you are using to make that decision? Is it the classic: if you were stuck on a deserted island who or what would you have to have with you? Is it who or what you lie in bed thinking about when you can't sleep at night? My first thought in considering this question is that it would be about what I spend my time, effort and money on, but then using that list of criteria I came up with things I do which are about living and getting through life; all very important and even good, but not what I would say I hold closest to my heart. You might have a different way to decide this, but what I have come up with that shows what matters most to me is that it's shown in the pictures which come up on the home screen of my phone. I can only have 50 pictures rotating through there, so I have selected them all carefully, and they are all pictures of, my family. What do you value, what do you hang your hat on, what matters to you the most?

And then, in thinking about that, has it always stayed the same, or has it changed at different times and stages of your life? Would the way you answer that question be different depending on who you are talking to, or the mood you are in, or the activity or experience you are having or have just had? Or, does it always stay the same? Does

what matters the most to you ever get challenged so that you find yourself totally rethinking and re-evaluating it?

What matters most? This is the question that Paul is addressing for us here in our reading for today, from chapter 3 of his letter to the Philippians. But to put it into context, he is addressing this question very much in regards to our relationship with God. And so, he starts by looking at it in the way that people often do; focusing on who we are and what we have done. So, says Paul, you want to talk about who is the most godly person, get a load of this: From the time I was born I have done everything in the right and Jewish way. I have come from the right nation and the right tribe. And then, when I grew up, I did everything God's Law told me to, and if that wasn't enough, I even made trouble for this new Christian church. 'I did everything the Law demands in order to please God.' (v. 6b) Beat that! With our Australian inclination to bring back to earth those who brag about themselves a bit too much, we may well respond to his opening here with, 'Mmm, a bit full of yourself there, aren't you mate?'

But he's not saying these things to brag, but instead to show us what is really important, what matters most. After laying down that if anyone could claim to earn God's love and favour by who they are what they do, it's him, Paul brings that crashing down by saying, 'But Christ has shown me that what I once thought was valuable is worthless. Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage.' (v. 7-8a) All that merit, either by birth or by action, when put up against what God has done for us in Jesus, it doesn't matter. We have nothing to boast in of ourselves, no actions that we can claim somehow get us closer to God. When it comes to what matters most in our relationship with God, it's all about having faith, and love, and trust in Jesus as our Saviour. What we now do is in response to the new life this now brings us, not to somehow earn it. What matters

most? That God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to be our Saviour, to die to pay the price for our sin and rebellion against Him, and to rise so we can share in this new life now and forever. What matters most is that we now know that God's love and forgiveness are with us whatever we go through, whatever we do, whenever we hold on to the faith He gave us in our Baptism, that He reminds of us again and again in His Word, and which we experience when we are joined to His death and resurrection when we share in the meal of Holy Communion. What matters most is that God's grace and all that brings comes to us through Jesus, and that whatever we now do is in response to that.

And then, why does what matters, matter? Because it's about how we live our lives now; how we relate to God, how sure we are of what we receive from Him, how we respond. Knowing that it is all about God's grace, the free gift of love and forgiveness, that frees us from always worrying about if we have done enough, if we are good enough. It helps us with those times when we struggle with our faith, or worry that we are drifting away from God, or make comparisons between what we see as the 'godly' lives of ourselves compared to others. As we read in the last part of this reading, it matters because we know that even though we know we aren't perfect, we know that the prize, the goal of new life with God, has already been won for us in Jesus.

It matters because we are free from the expectations we put on ourselves, and which we allow others to put on us, and free to simply respond in loving gratitude to what God gives to us. And a part of that is that we are free from our guilt; guilt from the things we have done in the past, and, when we bring them to God, from the things we still do today. We are free from the guilt of the things others know about, and those we only know about ourselves. The goal, the prize, of a new and free life with God now

and forever is already there for us, through Jesus. We gain that prize when we believe and trust in Him, not allowing other expectations or guilt to hold us back.

A phrase which keeps coming my head is, 'Yet not I, but through Christ in Me'. It's a phrase which sums up not just this reading but also this time of Lent; walking the way to the cross with Jesus, taking the time to examine our lives and what is important to us, what matters. It reminds us that we take this journey not to earn what is there at the end, but to receive what is already ours.

What matters most? I'm wondering if that is a question we might have different answers to depending on which part of our life we are relating it to. But I'm going to take a biased view and say the most important part of our lives, because everything comes from and is determined by that, is our relationship with God. And what matters most there is, grace. The grace of God's love and forgiveness for us. The grace which frees us from all the things which hold us back from freely and in love living our lives in Him. The grace which allows us to be all that God has made us to be as His people. Grace matters. Know it. Live it. Share it. Amen.

#### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- What matters most to you? What do you value? What comes into your head when you think of this? What criteria etc do you use to decide the answer to this question?
- In our relationship with God, how would you answer this question? Even though we might answer with things like, 'God's love and grace', is that how we always act?
- What holds us back from freely accepting the love and forgiveness God freely offers to us all? Guilt? Pride? Selfishness? Something else? If any of these are a burden for you, bring them to God and ask for His help in letting go of them so you can live a full life with Him.
- The race is already run, the prize is already won. Jesus has done all that is needed for us to have new life with God. What does this mean for how we now respond in a relationship and life with God which is based on His grace?

Pray: Thank God for His grace, which we freely live in each day. Ask Him to help us to receive His forgiveness and love for all the things which hold us back from fully living in Him, so that we can freely receive all He wants to give us through Jesus. Amen.

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