

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

23rd August 2020 – Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

ROMANS 12:1-8

GOD IS GOOD, AND SO WE ...

We have a lot of slogans around us don't we? I'm thinking especially of the kind of slogans or sayings which are used in marketing. They include sayings like; LG's 'Life's good', McDonald's – 'I'm Loving It', L'Oreal 'Because you're worth it'. BCF 'This is Living!'. Coke has had numerous ones over the years; 'the real thing', 'Coke is it', etc. Perhaps, for me anyway, one of the ones which may first come to mind is Nike's 'Just do it!'. If we look at these sayings and think about them, we see very quickly that on the whole they are very self-centred aren't they; they are encouraging you to indulge yourself, your passions, your likes. And that's not surprising, because we know that they exist to get us treat ourselves by spending our money on buying the products they are promoting.

Slogans, sayings, whatever we want to call them, are all around us. They are in songs. We can search for them on the internet. We hear them from other people; parents and grandparents are particularly good at passing them down. They're in the Bible. The kinds of sayings we may use as motivation or as a basis to guide how we think, speak and act can range from things like, 'Do unto others...' to 'we only have one planet', to 'you only live once', to 'What would Jesus do?'. To varying degrees, we may each have some sayings like these which we like and hold on to, and we may think about them when we make decisions regarding our actions and words.

It's probably pushing it a bit to say that when Paul wrote the words we have in this reading as part of a letter to Christians living in Rome 2,000 years ago, that he set out to give them a slogan for their lives. But if we look at slogans as working like: because of this ..., therefore we ..., it kind of works like that. Paul is giving us a teaching on ethics here, a guideline for how to live our lives and to make decisions, and he does that by three times reminding us; this is how God is, or what God does, and therefore in response this is how we act. Have a look at it in the reading: In verse 1: 'God is good'. In verse 3: 'I realise how kind God has been to me'. In verse 6: 'God has also given each

of us different gifts to use'. Three times, in three different ways, 'God is good', and then three times being told, 'this is what we now do'. Let's have a look at them.

How this teaching begins is really important. How is this whole section introduced? God is good. Who does it all start with? God, and also with a simple statement which sums up all God is and all God does. And then, this statement is followed up with; 'So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing'. Back in Old Testament times, pre-Jesus, people used to show their love to God by offering up a pure and valuable calf, lamb, or pigeon, depending on how wealthy they were, as a burnt sacrifice to God. In some ways that was easier; you could go to the temple, make your sacrifice, and then maybe go off and do whatever you wanted.

But now, it seems that we are not getting off the hook so easily. The response we are called to make to 'God is good', is to be a 'living sacrifice'. This means that everything we do we now do for God. In here also is the teaching not to follow the ways of the world around us, but to let God change the way we think. How might that look? Hate is replaced by love. Selfishness is replaced by generosity. Resentment is replaced by forgiveness. Anger is replaced compassion. Envy is replaced by thankfulness. There is a whole lot more we could put on to this list, but the basis of it is; because God is good, everything we now do, we do as people who live for Him.

The second section of this reading begins with, 'I realise how kind God has been to me'. It then goes on with, 'and so I tell each of you not to think you are better than you really are.' (v.3) In here also we have a brief reference to Christians being the body of Christ and all working together, in the same way our physical bodies have different parts which work together (Paul goes into this in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12). When we start to talk about working together, how we help one another, how we act as the body of Christ, this is where it can start getting a bit uncomfortable, can't it?

Because, have a think about what is said here, and what it means for us: 'God has been kind to me, and so...'. What's that saying about how I treat the needs of other people in our Church family, especially when they might clash with my own wants? What's it saying about how I put myself out for others? What's it saying about how things might not always be done the way I want? What's it

saying about how, like a physical body, we all have different roles to play in the Church, and different strengths, and we shouldn't look down on or judge others, thinking they have a lesser role in this body? What's it saying about what can now lie behind my thoughts, words and actions towards my church family and all of those who are in it?

And then the final section; a slightly different structure but the same outcome. Again, beginning with a statement of what God has done for us; 'God has also given each of us different gifts to use' (v. 6a), and then going on with the 'and so ...' which comes from that: 'if we can ...', 'if we can ...', talking about the gifts God has given us, and then 'if we...', 'if we ...', talking about the roles and positions God has placed us in.

As with the others, it all starts with? God. God has given each of us different gifts, all so we can worship Him with our lives and serve others in their needs. Our strengths complement others' weaknesses. Our weaknesses are complemented by others' strengths. We shouldn't be judging what people do, or don't do, what they give, or don't give. Nor should we be grumbling about what we have to do ourselves; we are told we should ... 'do it cheerfully' (v. 8) I don't know about you, but I can find this a bit hard to follow. My human nature is to look at what I do compared to others, and to begrudge that I sometimes feel that I am doing things others could be helping me with. Not always easy to do what it says here. But that doesn't stop what we are told to do here; use the gifts we have been given by God, both in our strengths and abilities as well as our physical possessions, to serve others; and carry out the service in the roles we have been placed in both faithfully and cheerfully.

There are lots of different ways we can look at what it means for us to respond to what God has done for us in how we live our lives and treat others, but this week as I was working through this reading I kept thinking of a poem by Mother Theresa called 'Anyway'. I share it with you now as a reflection of all we've talked about today: 'People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centred; Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; Succeed anyway. If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you; Be honest and frank anyway. What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight; Build anyway. If you find serenity and

happiness, they may be jealous; Be happy anyway. The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow; Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God; It was never between you and them anyway.'

'God is good, and so we ...'. Maybe not the catchiest slogan going around, and it certainly won't be used by Coke, or Nike, or Macca's anytime soon, but a great reminder that we live in the love and care of God, who blesses us in so many ways. Come up with your own slogan to help you remember this if you want, but we can all still pray; God help us to remember your love and goodness, for our minds to be formed and shaped by this, and for our lives to be a living, serving sacrifice and a witness to your love and goodness. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

God Is Good

The idea behind offering our bodies as a living sacrifice is that they don't 'burn up' but are an ongoing sacrifice to God.

- What image comes to you when you think of offering your body/life as a sacrifice to God?
- Are there any things you need to change in your life to do this more faithfully?
- How does seeing God's love, and all that He has done for us, as the starting point for this help you to carry this out more faithfully?

One Body, Many Parts

Viewing the Church as Jesus' body, and that body having many varied parts which work together, is a view Paul uses a few times in his letters.

- How do you view the Church as being like a body? What do you see your role as being in it?
- Do the various parts of this body always work well together? Do we equally value each part?
- How does beginning with remembering that God is always kind to us help us to work faithfully and co-operatively together for God and His kingdom?

Many Gifts, Many Callings, One Mission

Many of us don't like to identify our gifts, perhaps not even to ourselves. But God has gifted each one of us, in both our talents and abilities as well as with material possessions, so that we can carry out our calling to serve Him.

- What are your gifts? Just list them to yourself if you don't want to say them out loud, but you do have them.
 - How is God calling you to use these gifts in both worshipping Him with your life and serving others? Ask for His help if there are any areas of this you are struggling with.
- If you like, come up with your own 'slogan' to remind you of this message today. Try to make it something which will help you to remember this message as you go through this week.

Pastor Andrew Koehler
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