

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

30th August 2020, Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

ROMANS 12:9-18

HOPE + PEACE = LOVE

There's been a few things on the media this week which have caused me to ask myself the question; how do I act and live out my life as a Christian in the world and the society I am in? Or, on a more basic level; how do I make decisions about how I act, or react, to situations I come across in my life each day? Now, I know that the Bible gives me a lot of teaching, guidance, and advice about that, but in a down-to-earth, practical, everyday way, how does that look?

On News Breakfast the other morning they had a segment called something like, 'What Really Cheeses You Off?' People were sending in responses like; when people always use the phrase 'moving forward'; people getting 'who' and 'whom' mixed up; people using incorrect punctuation. Over my normally peaceful breakfast I found myself saying loudly, 'O come on you lot, let it go! Why do people get so worked up about the smallest things?' Later that day I was driving, and another driver did a manoeuvre to just slip around me and then squeeze back in between me and the car in front; all that to get one car forward in the traffic! I started fuming, and thinking how rude and arrogant that person was, that it was a personal attack on me, and what I would like to do (but of course wouldn't) to let them know just what good people think about that what they did! And then, I thought back to breakfast time, and had to think; 'Oh come on, Andrew! Let it go!'

The man responsible for last year's Christchurch massacre was sentenced this week. For the three days leading up his sentencing, survivors and family members of those who died told the court what his actions had done to them and their lives. There are instances on occasions like this where people get up and tell the perpetrator that they forgive them. That happened a bit here, but a lot of what we were shown was hatred and wanting to tell this man how low he is. And I can't blame them for that. How would I react if I were in their situation, with a loved one's life taken simply because of someone's hate and prejudice? I don't really know. But I do know that there are plenty of much smaller things which people do against me which I find it hard to forgive and move on from.

And then, with our world hoping and praying for an effective COVID vaccine, some Australian church leaders came out this week raising ethical concerns about the process being used by some of the researchers to develop it, saying they would personally boycott using a vaccine developed in this way. Are they wrong, or are they right? Our world, so many people, are dying, or physically suffering, or undergoing mental, financial, social hardship because of this pandemic, why would we want to speak against a vaccine? But, as Christians we have beliefs and teachings about life as God's creation, which we say shouldn't be compromised.

How we move through our day, how we go through our lives, isn't just black and white and straightforward. How do we respond to these kinds of issues which relate to how we treat people?

The reading we have here today, from Romans 12, is the first time in this long letter that Paul starts to talk about the love Christians are called to show to other people. He's written a lot about God's love for us, and then about how we respond to that in the way we love God, but here he starts to give us a very practical list of what it means to now show this love to those around us. Listed here are things like; taking care of the needy and welcoming strangers, not wanting revenge on people who do you wrong but asking God to bless them, being friends with others, loving each other and honouring others more than you do yourself. It's not the absolute 'this covers everything' list about loving others, but it does begin to show us what it means to pass the love we receive from God on to others.

What we're shown here is that love isn't a sentiment, or a thought, nor even something to be spoken about, but love is an: action. And of course, this isn't new to us from the Bible teachings, Jesus showed this a lot and it is what we are called to do in many places. So, the kinds of things talked about in here aren't new to us, but they are things we need to be continually reminded about. It's a change of attitude in how we view other people, which then comes out in how we treat and respond to them. It's a love which starts first of all inside of us, but then comes out in what we think, say and do.

And, when we go into this reading a bit more, there are two things in here which really stand out as to why we have this love; why God's love is both in us and comes out from us. The first of

these is the hope we have in God. The teaching here is, ‘Let your hope make you glad. Be patient in time of trouble and never stop praying.’ (Romans 12:12) Easy words to read, but not always so easy to take in and apply, but that’s more about us than about God. Where does this hope come from? It comes from knowing God’s promises to love us, to be with us, to forgive us, to care for us. It comes from seeing this promise fulfilled in both the history of God’s relationships with all His people, and experiencing these things in our lives. It’s a hope which gives us not only something to hold on to in our lives, but which also transforms us and helps us keep on moving forward with God.

The second thing which pops out here is peace; ‘do your best to live at peace with everyone.’ (Romans 12:18) We can share this peace, because we know this peace. The peace which passes all understanding. The peace of being able to rely on God and hand everything over to Him. A peace which, like God’s love, can’t be fully described, but can only be truly known when we experience it. I read about a study this week which said that, as expected, during this time of pandemic and all the uncertainty it brings many people are focusing more on their spirituality than before. But that sadly, for most people, that’s not about looking at religion, including Christianity. That saddens me, because I believe that in our God, and what He has done for us in Jesus, we have the only true peace that there can be; the peace which we all both seek and need for our lives. Again, a peace which we live in, but also which transforms and changes us.

The result of having this hope in God, and experiencing the peace of God, is love. It’s our love for God, but here what is particularly focused on is our love for others. This love is what helps us with those decisions of; what am I going to get upset about, and what am I going to let go? How do I respond to people who do something against me; with hatred and a desire for revenge, or with God’s help being able to forgive and release us both? How do I make ethical decisions on matters about which the teachings of the Bible seem clear and straightforward, but even very learned Christian leaders disagree on how we apply them today? While these things still won’t always be black and white, and sometimes we might really struggle with them, and even be unable to carry out the ways God is calling us to respond, we can know that we are called to live out our lives with others by showing out that love of God we have within us. Although some practical ways of doing this are

listed here, really what it is all about is this; having God's love in us and transforming us by the Holy Spirit, and then allowing it to come out in what we do.

Hope, plus peace, equals love. Through faith in God, and knowing all that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit do in our lives, this is something we can all know. And now, in the way we respond to people, in the way we see and fulfill needs, in the way we relate to others, in the attitude we have towards them, it's this same love God now calls us to allow to come out so that others can see and know His love also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION:

Hope In God

'Let your hope make you glad. Be patient in time of trouble and never stop praying.' (Romans 12:12 CEV).

- What does hope in God mean to you? How do you experience it in your life?
- Are there times in your life, or certain situations, where you struggle to have hope and to be 'patient in time of trouble'?
- Thank God for the hope He gives to you, and ask Him to help you to hold on to this hope even when it is difficult.

Living in Peace, Passing on Peace

'Do your best to live at peace with everyone.' (Romans 12:18 CEV)

- What does it mean to you to have the peace of God in your heart? Does it have an effect on your life each day?
- Do you sometimes struggle to show peace to all people you come into contact with?
- Thank God for His great peace for us, and ask Him to help you to always show it out to others.

Love Going Out

'Be sincere in your love for others.' (Romans 12:9 CEV). The love we are called to show here is a real love, a practical and going out love, a love shown to others in response to God's love for us.

- Look at the examples of loving others which we are given here in this reading. What are some ways you can show this in your life?
- Think about some areas of your life in which you struggle to show love to others. Ask God to help you to do what we are called to do here.
- Thank God love He shows to us. Pray that His hope, peace and love with continually transform our hearts, minds and lives so that we can be a reflection of His love.

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30.8.2020*