

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Pentecost 8C OS 18 Proper 13

Sunday 31 July 2022

The deep story of God's love for all

There are different ways of telling the story of Christianity.

There is a version of the gospel which emphasises God as judge. The story of Christianity is told that God created we messed up God sent Jesus to be punished on our behalf and now we are right with God and we now just need to believe and behave.

When I was a child I remember plenty of times hearing God described as a wrathful God and that God would find out if we'd been naughty so you had to be really good.

God was an angry God and you'd better watch out.

It is very easy then for faith to become about doing the right thing and earning your way to heaven by staying within the set lines. It is easy then for faith to become I'm doing the right thing so I'm fine and those people over there aren't so they are out of the kingdom.

It is easy for our security and safety for being a Christian to become about following the rules and to close our minds.

We get caught in the narrow gospel and become judges of others from our so called place of security of rightness and no longer become open to learn from different perspectives.

It is very easy to place our security in a black and white form of gospel.

The ancient words of Hosea portray a very different image of God, something that is a lot deeper than the narrow story.

There is a depth of longing and yearning and love displayed.

This passage was written centuries ago and yet could have been written yesterday.

It is raw, it is full of love and longing and relationship.

God speaks of his relationship with his people as a parent for a child.

When Israel was a child I loved him. Out of Egypt I called my Son. It was me who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them up in my arms but they did not know I healed them.

Here is an intimate picture of God who loves us from the very beginning of our lives before we even can remember.

There is so much of our early lives that we may not remember, but it is the care and love at that time that nurtures us.

I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. How often do we see the delight and love in a parent's or grandparent's face when they meet a child or grandchild for the first time and want that skin to skin contact, that intimate touch, that out pouring of love.

Miriam Margoyles interviewed a woman who has fostered 100's of babies as well as raising her own 6 children and Miriam asked her how she did it.

She said my heart grows bigger.

Here is God's heart growing bigger as Israel grows whose depth of love is huge and continues to become greater even as Israel goes further away from God and they refused to return to God.

We catch a glimpse here of how much God loves us. There is pain in God's heart at the estrangement of God's children at their refusal to return and seeking after other Gods.

There continues to be a longing and a love that still remains.

How can I give you up Ephraim cries out God?

God's compassion grows warm and tender as three times God refuse to execute anger, I will not I will not, I will not come in wrath.

Instead God comes to us in the flesh of Jesus and in love for us enters our pain and suffering and separation and brings us back into the heart of God through the living love, dying and rising of Jesus.

God's heart roars like a lion, for us.

This is something deep and visceral. It reminds me of Ash Barty's reaction after her Australian Open win.

She roared mouth open wide letting out all the pent up emotion, roared with a deep visceral response to what had happened, to something that she had longed for.

There is something deep and visceral about the love of God our creator for us, so deep that God is prepared to be with us in flesh, in life and in death and through it.

The image here in this story is of a passionate loving God who agonizes on our behalf, who keeps longing for us and brings us close to us in Christ.

This story is what makes Christianity so attractive to me.

This is much broader and deeper than the thin story that puts God in a narrow role just as judge. It is a story of a God who loves us and longs for us to keep coming home to God.

God's children will come home from the west where our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

Bishop Leonard Wilson was Bishop of Singapore during WW11 and was interred in a prison camp by the Japanese.

The Japanese were well known for treating prisoners harshly.

After the war he was asked how he could go on in relationship with the Japanese after the harsh way they treated those who they imprisoned.

He said I imagined them as the little children they had once been before they were corrupted by ideology.

This is a glimpse of how God views us – a God who leads us with human kindness with bands of love.

Our security is based in the depths of God's love for us that shapes us to be merciful and gracious and loving – the Lord whose loving mercy is forever.

Lectio:
Hosea 11.1-11
Psalm 107.1-9, 43
Colossians 3.1-11
Luke 12.13-21