

Brackenhurst: 1 March 2009
Majesty and Miracles

Welcome & Notices

Scripture:

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 11:20-24

Message

INTRODUCTION

- Short! — focus on sacrament
- “Come follow me” (will be looking at this in more detail in a couple of weeks time) is hallmark of Christian faith
 - Each one of us is here today because we have heard that call in some form or another
 - * Non of us is perfect, none of us have got that right
- But we have heard the words “Come follow me” and we’re doing our best to respond to them
 - As we enter Lent we are encouraged to be more intentional in that journey, and so our journey over the next weeks of Lent is going to be
 - * “Following in the Footsteps of Christ”
- And looking at how we can best respond to those around us the way Christ responded to those around him
 - so that the Kingdom of God is proclaimed
- Lent, by its very nature, calls us to a new intentionality of of faith journey, it calls us to repentance, it calls us to turn away from the distractions of life and to focus on Christ, and the journey that he calls us on
 - It is a time of preparation for the new life that is to be found at Easter
- And as such it is a preparation for what we celebrate and remember tonight
 - Christ’s body broken for us.
- So I would ask that we keep his ultimate sacrifice in mind as we begin the journey
 - Let spend tonight, as we hear the word, thinking of what we will celebrate in a moment
- This is not something that is tacked on at the end of the service, but should be every bit as important and the songs that we sing, and the sermon that we hear, and as the prayers that we make.

- So I don't want to speak long this evening, I simply want for us to reflect on the start of Lent, and what it means for us.
- And so as we begin our Lenten journey of journeying with Jesus I would remind you that that is a journey towards the cross
 - We can't avoid it
 - * But it is in the cross that we discover who we are.
- Three thoughts to guide our thinking on what Lent is about tonight
 - Humility
 - Hope
 - Humanity

It is only when we clothe ourselves with Christ (Rom 13:11-14) and seek to follow him that we discover who we really are. (Challenge of Lent).

(1) Humility

- The first thing that I want to say is that Lent is about humility
 - Now I want to be clear that humility is not about allowing others to walk all over us
 - * Or about thinking that we have to be worthless to be a Christian
- God has created each one of us to be of infinite worth to him
 - There's a lovely line in our Ash Wednesday liturgy that you will have heard if you were here on Wednesday morning
 - "God hates nothing that he has created"
- So humility isn't about saying I'm worthless — in fact we are warned in scripture about the dangers of false humility in worship
 - Rather, humility is about recognising that we are not God, and that we don't have the right to fill ourselves with all kinds of luxuries and good things
 - * The right — we use that word a lot today...
- Humility is about saying we don't actually have the right
 - We don't have the right to question God when things don't go our way
 - * We don't get the car, or the girl or the job that we're looking for.
- Humility is about recognising that we are not the King of the universe
 - That's why we begin our Lenten fast with the sign of the ashes
 - * Ashes which have been symbols of repentance for years to come
- Jesus speaks to his disciples in that passage we read earlier and he tells them of the arrogance of the people in the towns where he performed miracles
 - And it seems as though they saw it as their right to demand these things from Jesus
 - * Instead of humbling receiving the gift which he offered them
- There are many of us here tonight who have experienced God is a wonderful way

- Some of us have even experienced the miraculous
- The question I want to ask as we prepare for Lent and Communion
 - What have you done with those experiences?
- Do they become just something that happens, that you take for granted
 - Or do they call you to a deeper humility of what God can do
 - * And a deeper desire to live your life more faithfully for God's purposes?
- As we approach Lent and Easter let's do that with a sense of humility for what God has done in our lives

(2) Hope

- Secondly I want us to reflect on the hope of the Easter story.
 - While Lent is a time of self denial
 - a time when we intentionally turn away from rich things
 - * And embrace the humble
- it is also a time which leads irrevocable truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - The irrevocable truth in which we see God made man resurrected from the dead
- It is this hope that has kept the Christian church faithful for over 2000 years.
 - That is what this celebration has been about over the years
- As people prepare themselves for the start of a new life symbolised by baptism
 - The hope of new life offered
 - * They do that by going through a period of self denial
- Now this is what I want to note as we reflect on Lent this evening
 - the hope of Easter Sunday morning is only found as a result of self denial.
- We're on a journey with Jesus, growing in our faith
 - And we read in Hebrews that all the people of God are on a journey
- The author uses the example of the fathers of the faith, Abraham and Moses and others who left the places they were at
 - To go on a journey
 - * And those journeys were journeys of hope
 - "Because they hoped for a better place", they were looking for a better country
 - * They were willing to leave behind comforts and familiarity to deny themselves because of the hope that they had that things could be better
- It was Christ who said — take this cup of suffering from me, yet not my will — but yours be done.
 - It is when we deny ourselves and humble ourselves again to the will of God that the hope of God can be born in us again

- * That the light of Christ can shine through us as hope for a suffering world
- * And that the life of God can be offered to a world that continuously rejects him
- Hope is found only through a period of self-denial when we learn to trust in the resurrection power of God.

(3) Humanity

- The last thing that I want to say this evening as we spend time reflecting is that Lent reminds us of our humanity
 - And it does that in such a way that we become more aware of our human appetites by choosing to deny them for a time
- This doesn't mean that our human appetites are bad
 - Hunger is necessary of our survival — if we don't feel hungry we won't eat and we'll die
 - Our sexual desires are necessary for the survival of the species
- These are the things that make us human and of course God wants us to enjoy not just food and sex, but all the other desires and dreams and hopes that we have as men and women
 - God created us human with those passions and desires and he does not hate them
 - * But a time of self-denial helps us to become more aware of the desires, desires that are rooted in our humanity.
- In Romans we read that we are to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and not to think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful natures.
 - Now that's a good verse for Lent, but it also teaches us how to be more fully human!
- Remember that Jesus was God, but Jesus was also fully man.
 - Clothing ourselves with Christ, instead of all the other meaningless desires we have — meaningless, not meaningful
 - * teaches us how to become the people that God created us to be
- It doesn't mean that we are to become like God, but it means that we are to become the humans that God dreamt about and created out of the dust of the earth
 - We are to be more fully human
 - * Created in the image of God
- So the purpose of denying ourselves in Lent then, is to get rid of the rubbish that fills our lives

- The rubbish that is meaningless and has no eternal, greater purpose than elevating our status.
 - * And to remember who we really are supposed to be.
 - * The passions and desires that are God given
- It is only when we clothe ourselves with Christ that we discover who we really are
 - And so Lent is about discovering our true humanity.

CONCLUSION

- As I said earlier the whole meaning of Lent is wrapped up in the sacrament of Holy Communion
 - As we remember how Christ went to the cross for all of us
 - How he gave up his own life to show how much he loves us
 - To show how the Father accepts us
 - * It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us
- As we celebrate tonight let us focus on the sacrament with the humility that it calls from us
 - Let us look on it with the hope of the resurrection to come
 - And let us discover our own humanity in it as we become who we are meant to be in Christ
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

Come as you're ready