

# ***Welcoming the outsider***

*Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (OS 28C)*

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## **Sunday, October 9, 2022**

One of the exciting things about the stories in today's readings from the Old Testament and the Gospel is how God reached out from within the confines of the Jewish nation into all the world. Indeed, perhaps this is the sharpest contrast between the inward looking Judaism that we see in the world today and the message of the Gospel.

The healing of Lepers was astounding in itself, but this is not the point of these stories, for they not only speak of the power of God, but the love of God for all humanity and not restricted only to the nation that was so chosen. As we have read through the Gospel of Luke during this year, I hope that you have gained the sense that Luke is emphasising how Jesus was concern for the outcast and the foreigner. As Gentile Christians we have been the beneficiaries of this Gospel for all the world. We are blessed, not because God loved the Jews but because through the Jews, God loved the world. Indeed, Paul in Romans 5 reminds us that the love of God was not for the worthy, but for the unworthy:

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

Then as we reflect on this Gospel, we can be challenged by the unusual nature of the Christian religion. It is not about being good enough for God or even about being in the 'in' group, but rather it is about the drawing to God of the outsider, the outcast, and the social misfit. Now if Jesus was prepared to cross the cultural and social barriers to reach out to those who were otherwise excluded then we, who say each week – We are the body of Christ – We are duty bound to do likewise.

As Christ's body here in Willochra, we are called upon to be Jesus Hands and Feet to this community and as such, we are to reach out to the unlovely and the outcast in this place in his name.

This is pretty frightening stuff. Not only when hearing for the first time, but anytime that you are called to consider it. It means that we are to take the risk with our faith but isn't this the definition of faith. For faith is the opposite of certainty. The strength of our faith is shown by how far we go beyond certainty of what it is that we see with our eyes, hear with our ears and touch with our hands. It is going beyond the physical reality to the point of trusting the God in who we profess our faith.

Now it would be easy for me to stand here and say. Here is the message of the gospel – reach out to the stranger and the alien – do what we see Jesus doing. This is merely trying to codify the expression of our faith into a set of practices. Now this is not what it is that I am on about. This is not what I think that my job is.

Perhaps it would be best to start then with a thought about what I am seeing as my role in the district. It is easy to talk in terms of action and activities. It is quite fashionable to

think in terms of programs. I hope that I will lead you by example and share with you in ministry, but this is a consequence of the larger picture. I see that I am called to this place to teach you how to pray – not that I presuppose that some of you could really teach a lot. But it is my desire that we would be known as a praying Ministry Unit. Second, I see that my role is to help each one stretch their faith. I am not so much interested in people being comfortable as that they will be challenged. I am not talking here about big things necessarily but helping individuals to take God at his word and act in faith. I would like at the end of each year to be able to look back and identify things that we have had to achieve by faith. So, in essence, I am not interested so much in creating a programme to reach out to the stranger, the outcast and the lonely, but rather to see to growth of faith in each individual that means that they can do that with confidence. Our gathering together is about the mutual encouragement of one to another to do more by faith and less by sight.

Well, how is it that we begin. Well,

let us take up challenge of today's readings – let us look at the problem of reaching out to the outsider. Think for a moment of someone that you have contact with in our community that you consider to be well outside the church. Think about them for a moment. What is it that stops them from coming. Now I could simply say to you, I want you to go up and invite them to join us. But no. What it is that I want you to do, is to start to pray for that person, that the barriers to them joining us will be broken down, and for the part that I can play in helping them to join into the fellowship of believers.

Can you do that for me. Can we together do that for God.

The saying is sure:

    If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

        if we endure, we will also reign with him;

    if we deny him, he will also deny us;

        if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself

If God is who we say he is then nothing is impossible if we have faith.

**AMEN.**