

# ***Three Dimensions of Faith***

## ***Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany***

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# **Sunday, January 29, 2023**

Consider this scenario - You are just about to go to the post office, when someone calls out to you - "Excuse me! Excuse me! I wonder if you could help me?" You stop and look around and see a stranger standing there and so you stop and turn towards them and mutter something like "I will if I can, what is the problem?" "Quietly they say, "Well I know you're part of the Anglican church and I just want to know, what it means to be a Christian?"

It kind of puts you on the spot doesn't it!

But it is the sort of question that each of us should be prepared to answer. Now I am not talking about becoming a Christian, (although I think it is important to be able to respond to that). I am thinking more along the lines of 'how do we please God?' Having become a Christian, How then should we live?

You see it is a tremendous concern, that many people find the church alienating, because of the way that the people in it (the Christians with a capital C, live). Sooner or later, we all come across someone who will say to us in all sincerity - I can't go to church because it is full of hypocrites. (I always must resist the temptation to respond with "why not, there is always room for one more!!")

But you see that more often than not they are right, as people seem to perpetuate a discrepancy between their words and their actions. And I don't necessarily blame them for this state of affairs, because often the church leadership (or eldership) has failed to teach them.

But we deviate... The question - how do we live as Christians? Or how do we live out lives that are pleasing to God? is important. For it is in the practical outworking of our faith, that we become the people that God would have us be.

Now the church has traditionally the sacramental response -> By this I mean that we attend church regularly! Perhaps this is what the diocese's obsession with figures is all about. It is easy for me to stand here and urge you to come to services. (Although one wise priest told me that this was often a pointless exercise as the people who needed to hear this message were the people who weren't here, and it was pointless to tell the ones that were, that they should come, because they had already responded to this message.)

Church attendance is important, but it is not the desire of God. Hear the echoes of Micah -  
<sup>6</sup> *"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"* This question has a resounding no for the answer. Or as Isaiah puts it *The Lord said: These people draw near with their mouths and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote;* Or as the Psalmist puts it -  
<sup>8</sup> *Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. <sup>9</sup> I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds. <sup>10</sup> For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. <sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. <sup>12</sup> "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. <sup>13</sup> Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"*

These prophets all point us towards something else. It is the heart that is important. As we read through the prophets, there is the distinctive dissatisfaction by God with people going through the motions. Christianity, or indeed being in God's favour is about the heart which leads to action.

And how do we know about this heart - it is evidenced in the lives we live. As Micah puts it so well:

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

to do justice, and  
to love kindness, and  
to walk humbly with your God

To do... To love... and to walk humbly

**To do justice**, is to take action. Hearts that are turned to God, that are in harmony with his, cannot stand by and see injustice done. How does that saying go - "All Evil needs to flourish is for good men (and women) to stand by and do nothing.

It is easy to stand by, to stand aloof, to not get involved, for demanding justice has its price. Let us rejoice at the many Christians throughout history who stood up for the things of God. William Wilberforce and his abolition of slavery. Or more recently - Frank Brennan fighting for Aboriginal Land Rights. Or Oscar Romero who was silenced by those who he criticised. As one of Brazil's Catholic Bishop's so rightly pointed out, "If I feed the poor, they call me a saint. If I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist!"

As God's people we are called our hands dirty, to take risks for the sake of Justice. To do. To be active. Whether this be through petition or amnesty international or something more. We are called to get involved. We are called to take a stand.

**To love kindness**. To love is about how we feel. It is about what it is that motivates us. SO to love kindness is about promoting it. It is easy for us to become judge and jury. It is easy for us to condemn others - especially those who transgress God's ways, but to love kindness is about loving mercy. It is about tempering our judgements with mercy. It is about choosing the way which is kind. Often this is the hard way, especially if it is we who have been offended, but it is only way for God's people. In the prayer we say each week, we ask God to forgive us our sins to the measure in which we forgive others. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy - From God if not from humanity. Loving kindness is about embracing the generous love of God for ourselves and giving it to others.

And finally, **to walk humbly**. Many Christians fail because they seek to usurp God. Rather than being God's agents in the world, they would like to be God instead. To play God, to control others. Perhaps the greatest sin of church leaders is to rob people of their free will. To walk humbly with God, is to acknowledge the Journey, and the leading of the Father, and companionship of the Son on the way. To walk humbly is to push God to the forefront of every aspect of our lives. To fade into his shadow, that we might become insignificant. As John the Baptist put it - I must decrease so that he might increase.

Many of you, I know are doing these things, so let us take today's reading to encourage us to continue in them. Let us seek to do justice... to love kindness and to walk humbly with God. Let us pray, that these will be the marks of our church and our congregations as well as ourselves.

Before we go on with the creed, I just ask you to sit for a moment, that we might consider these three dimensions of faith. In the silence, ask God to show you new challenges in justice, kindness and humility.

**AMEN**