

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
26 August, 2007

1. **We don't know what Jesus was preaching** that day in the synagogue, but we might make some suggestions—the kingdom of God, the law of love, freedom from whatever binds, compassion for those in need, the desire of God for us to live abundant lives, full of the richness of his grace. Jesus would have been unwrapping the truth about God from the Scriptures and freeing it from the trappings which religion had placed around it. His words gave way to action in the healing of the woman. (Luke 13.10-17), a kind of living parable.
2. **His compassion** produced immediate criticism from the leader of the synagogue and the people who witnessed it, for the emphasis in the Jewish religion at that time was on holiness. Keeping the Sabbath had been extended literally to encompass minute rules. Curing was seen as work. Jesus' explanation in relation to the watering of animals put them to shame for here was a woman also being offered the water of life.
3. **Too often we may let our** rules impede the good work of compassion. This may be something we do as an individual, a community or a society. Think of the way Australia has treated those seeking refuge from oppressive political regimes., those we call detainees. And illegal immigrants. Think for example of the overzealous imposition of the rule about touching children by a teacher, when a child needs hugging or comforting. Think about risk management policies which are driven by fear of being sued rather than genuine concern for the welfare of children and adults. Think of the bureaucratic impediments our society puts in the way of people in need of money and support. Think of the disapproval of people in church when children interrupt their prayers and the criticism of parents and grandparents unable to control their children. Holiness can get in the way of compassion.
4. **Jesus spoke of the freedom** that God wants for all his children. His "vision statement" in Luke 4. 18 was just words unless he also brought freedom to those bound by illness, fear, oppression and injustice. His works and his words were in agreement. May ours be also.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
5 August, 2007

1. **Western countries are obsessed by possessions.** Shopping is a major pastime; we have shopaholics, and those who just 'shop till they drop'. Shopping sprees, and annual sales produce outrageous behaviour in the competition to buy bargains. Catalogues, TV and other advertising urge us to buy more and more, not just of the necessities for life but of things we could really do without. Last year's model isn't good enough. We judge people by the goods they own, and we feel we need bigger incomes to provide for our family's desire for things. Deprivation of a child of brand name sneakers is nearly child abuse!
2. **It's not that we don't need things for living.** It's OK to own nice things and to enjoy our comfortable lifestyles. It's OK to have money in the bank and plenty of superannuation, and to be able to provide well for your families now and in the future. There are so many good things you can do with money. By themselves money and possessions are not evil, and in fact we would say necessary. When Jesus spoke about possessions in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12. 13-21), he did not deny that they were necessary. Rather he spoke about greed, and the attitude that sees that the meaning of life is found in possessions. The rich man lived his life without God, the giver of life, thinking that he was in control, a life which is ultimately futile because it has not included any of the treasures of eternal life, the things which transcend the physical.
3. **What preparations do we need to make for eternal life?** The writer of Colossians gives an answer (Col. 3.1-11) "Set your minds on things that are above". He urges us to put to death greed which is a form of idolatry and to seek those things which will help us transform and transcend this world. The things above are not things which will satisfy our self-centred needs. Our new self as Christians will treasure those things which bring us into a right relationship with God and with others forgiveness, service, unconditional love. Our pleasure will come from those relationships rather than in the emptiness and futility of those things and actions which we think will make us comfortable or full of satisfaction now.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
12 August, 2007

1. **The recent National Church Life Survey** asked to what extent our faith has grown in the past year. Overall in the Diocese of Willochra 23% said there had been much growth, 46% some growth and 18% no growth. It would be interesting to know how people interpreted 'faith' in that question. .
2. **The writer to the Hebrews defines faith** as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen".(11.1) Faith is believing what God promises: as simple as that. He goes on to give many examples of faithful people. Abraham is regarded as the 'Father of Faith" who set out not knowing where he was to go, trusting in God's promise, putting down no roots but looking forward to a sure foundations in the promised land. The people of generations to come, listed in today's reading, followed in Abraham's footsteps. We are Abraham's present generation of faithful, hopeful people. "In faith and hope and love/ with joyful trust we move/towards our Father's home above" McAuley AHB 555
3. **Luke 12.35-40** looks forward to the end of time and the coming of the Lord. However, Luke has given this parable Eucharistic overtones. *Let your loins be girded...* reminds us of the readiness of the Hebrews as they ate their Passover meal, before stepping out in faith in God's saving power. As we await the Lord's coming, we celebrate the Eucharist. At his table, he comes and serves us. At every Eucharist Christ our Passover is celebrated and Christ is with us as both Lord and host (See AHB 453). He comes to us in the breaking of the bread
4. **Be ready for action, watch, be alert.** These actions are associated with faith and hope, a preparedness to trust and believe in God's promise, a readiness to step out into the unknown. As Christians we are called to be on the move, not bogged down by ideas that we can make our own security; not lulled into false assumptions that we can establish our own heaven but on the move towards eternal life with God. The spiritual food of the eucharist strengthens us for action in the world, led by the Spirit to live and work for God's praise and glory, to love God and our neighbour as we move Godward. Faith is an assurance of things hoped for, not a passive belief but an empowerment for action. A Church which is growing in faith must surely be growing in action.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
19 August, 2007

1. **Hebrews 11.29-12.2** lists the achievements and the sufferings of well-known figures in history. Faith is a two-edged sword. It means trusting in God, no matter what may happen, believing in the unseen purpose of God, despite the suffering that must be endured. The people of God earned the right to be called that because of the history of their faith through centuries. Yet even then, these faithful heroes, "did not receive what was promised" - eternal life with God.
2. **But Jesus is the supreme example of faith**, the pioneer showing the way, and the perfecter bringing about atonement with God through his death, perfect reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 12.49-50). It was not easy for Jesus; the gospel reveals his stress and we see it more fully in the Garden of Gethsemane. There is no crown of glory without the cross of suffering. What an enigmatic message!
3. **On 2 September** we remember with thanksgiving the New Guinea martyrs, 12 Anglicans, and altogether 333 priests, evangelists, teachers, medical staff and other workers from many denominations who laid down their lives for their friends, following the example of their Lord. See www.satucket.com/lectionary/Martyrs_New_Guinea.htm More recently in the Solomons we have the example of seven Melanesian Brothers, See www.sibconline.com.sb/tribute.htm for the full story of men 'who simply tried to follow their Lord Jesus Christ to witness the gospel and bring peace and reconciliation". Around the world in history and the present we can find examples of those who have suffered as they ran with perseverance the race that was set before them. (Heb. 12.1.)
4. **What form does the cross take** in the lives of Christians today in our society? Martyrdom may not be ours, but there are some who will suffer the scorn and derision of family and acquaintances, the jeering of individuals in the media from time to time, the lack of sympathy from those who fail to grasp why we hold our faith so dear, even the loss of friends. But we are surrounded by 'a crowd of witnesses', we have the example of Jesus, and we have faith that it will lead to joy in life eternal.