

# Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

## 7th September 2008

[Sunday between 4 and 10 September Year A ]

1. If you ask people to tell which image of Jesus is their favorite, many will describe the shepherd carrying home the lost sheep. Many churches in Willochra have a framed poster of the Good Shepherd. We respond willingly to the concepts of forgiveness and wholeness, closeness and restoration that the image evokes.
2. We respond less willingly to Jesus' words in Matthew 18.10-20 which follow the image. We don't like to dwell on the idea of reproofing others for their sin and treating them like out-casts if they don't change their ways. These are indeed some of the harsh words of Jesus, unexpected from the Good Shepherd.
3. It's never easy to tackle someone who has offended you, or whose behaviour is unacceptable. We lay ourselves open to the charge of being hypocritical or judgmental. It's a difficult path to tread between compassion and judgmentalism, but Jesus' words clearly indicate that confrontation of sin is the loving thing to do. In the reading from Ezekiel 33.7-11, we are warned from opting out lest be responsible for any evil which results.
4. Romans 13.1-10 reminds us that civic responsibilities are just as important as religious duties. How then, do we react to people whom we know are trying to evade tax, or to cheat the welfare system or to disobey parking laws or bending the law a little? Jesus shows how difficult matters can be dealt with discreetly. Paul stresses that this duty is to be done in love. Our Church has had to think seriously about these matters in relation to abuse and harassment. A notice in every church reminds us that we have a process for addressing complaints, and of course, if behaviour is criminal, then we report it to the police.
5. And what if I or you are the offender? It's not nice to be told that your behaviour is offensive or that your actions verge on the edge of cheating or fraud, but if someone is kind enough to take us aside, or the Church is concerned enough to confront us with love, then perhaps we should be grateful that they care so much about us. It might be hard, but we need to remember Jesus' promise that he is there with you as you deal with it.

# Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## 14th September 2008

[Sunday between 11 and 17 September Year A]

1. There is a fine line between compassionate confrontation of wrong and judgmentalism. In matters not central to our faith there will be different interpretations of what is 'right' and there is no point in condemning what others find helpful. The Anglican Communion, in thinking of the major issues facing it today needs to determine whether they are central or not. At a local level we probably know of instances in our homes or congregations where there has been criticism and condemnation over things that are not central.
2. But when there is offence, there also needs to be forgiveness. Jesus' teaching on this is central to our faith. Matthew 18.21-35 gives Jesus' core teaching about forgiveness and the compassionate nature of God. First the exaggerated "seventy-seven times" -we must forgive again and again. That is shocking enough, but the parable is even more confronting in its presentation of God and in what he requires of us.
3. God is compassionate—described eloquently in the Psalm, like the king in the parable, like Joseph in Genesis 50.15-21. The preacher can elaborate on these three readings. God's compassion and forgiving love lead to redemption, transformation and salvation
4. The Roman Christian community (Romans 14.1-14) was beset with problems of criticism and judgmentalism. Today churches might even suffer in the same way. Give examples.
5. As members of the kingdom of God we are called to be like him in compassion as individuals and communities. Jesus calls us to the way of the Kingdom. As sinners, we are completely dependent on God's mercy, so those who fail in relationship with us are completely dependent on our mercy. We need not wait for someone to deserve forgiveness; forgiveness is a gift from the giver. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us is central to the Lord's Prayer, and central to our faith.

# Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## 21st September 2008

[Sunday between 18 and 24 September Year A]

1. Begin with a story about generosity: tell of someone's gift, hospitality or character; the generosity of people in the bushfires; the emotions associated with receiving overwhelming generosity. Today's readings continue the theme of God's compassionate nature by elaborating on the extraordinary generosity of God whose ways are beyond our understanding.
2. Matthew 20.1-16 The labourers in the vineyard are treated generously because the landowner is compassionate and generous. They did not deserve equal pay. Generosity and compassion are not earned, they are the gift of the giver. The other labourers did not understand for they judged by our standards not God's. The kingdom of God is like this where God's generosity is not understood.
3. What an illustration of God's generosity we have in Exodus 16. 2-15. In their need in the wilderness, God caused quails and manna to rain from the heavens, enough for each day. There was no need to hoard, no need to worry, for morning by morning they gathered what they needed for each day. This story from the past is remembered in Exodus as an illustration of God's generous providence and love for his people.
4. Often in our news we see the natural response of many people to difficulties is to be mean, vindictive and punishing rather than understanding and merciful. In court cases, victim's families screech for revenge. Exacting the 'pound of flesh' that Shakespeare portrayed is common-place in our world in business, in family relationships, in community dealings.
5. We are called to live our lives worthy of the gospel (Phil 1) imitating God as much as we can. As God is compassionate we are called to be compassionate. As God is generous we are called to be generous people and communities, fulsome in worship, full of praise and encouragement, abundant in giving, free with hospitality, tolerance of difference, and forgiveness. Such a community will be a mission community because it will want also to be generous with the Gospel. How generous are we?

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost 28th September 2008

[Sunday between 25 September and 1 October YEAR A]

1. Most of us have something that we've always been going to do—e.g. sort out the photographs, visit great aunt Mary, etc. The fact that we don't do them means that we've actually made a choice not to do it. We sometimes long for someone we love to do something they should—e.g. teenager to develop study skills, smoker to stop smoking, etc. Despite our concerns and urging, there is nothing we can do about it. They must actually choose for themselves to do what is right.
2. God's longs for us to make right choices, between sin and righteousness, between trusting God and trying to be independent. The story of the water from the rock is a prime example of people who failed to understand that God was with them through the good times and the bad times of life. (Exodus 17.1-7). They quarreled with Moses and 'tested the Lord', not believing in his providence but giving into despair and frustration. But the Lord was there, going before them. His promise was sure. If they chose to obey God's call, to choose his life over slavery, then they were entering a covenant based on trust.
3. The gospel parable (Matthew 21.23-32) shows that our choices are complete only when acted upon. God does not want us to make life choices with our lips and not carry them out. He gives the example of the outcasts of Jewish society, tax-collectors and prostitutes, whose actions of repentance and turning to God were more praiseworthy than the avowed righteousness of others.
4. In our Baptism we make choices. (APBA p. 75) but they are only real when we act on them. Christ himself is the model of the way we need to act on our choice to turn to him. Philippians 2. 1-13 "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus". The passage elaborates on the Christ life.
5. Everyday we make life choices in our relationship with others: choices about honesty, generosity, forgiveness, power, status. Having chosen to turn to Christ, to live, his Spirit is with us to choose and act according to his goodness