

Howrah Sandford Weekly Church Bulletin

SUNDAY SERVICES at St Thomas's Howrah 8.30 and 10 am (both Holy Communion) and St Barnabas's South Arm 10 am (Holy Communion). We are regularly assessing how to improve the quality of worship, fellowship and hygiene. Online worship at stthomashowrah.com

Sunday 5th July 2020

THEME: Our mission, part 1: "Love God and his people"

SENTENCE OF SCRIPTURE: "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people." (Acts 2)

BIBLE READINGS:

First reading: Acts 2: 42-47

Psalm: 122

Gospel: John 13: 31-35

SERMON from Leonie

Last week we looked at our vision for the future of our Parish..... "to become a growing Christian community of all ages, reflecting the diversity of our local community and living out God's Word in our daily lives". Today our focus is on the first of three ways to achieve this.

The first fruit of the Holy Spirit, **love**, is a great beginning to our Parish Mission: "to love, to grow and to share." Asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' The timing when Jesus spoke these words was so important. Because Jesus gave this teaching to his disciples the night before he was crucified; it was his final teaching to them before he died. He goes to the heart of the Christian faith and is saying to them, "Before I die, this is what you really need to know..." There was no limit to his sacrifice – because there was no limit to his love for us. In truth, Jesus didn't just make sacrifices for us. He became a sacrifice for us... and as we receive his gift which is freely given and not deserved – Jesus tells his disciples on the basis of God's own love for us, we are to do the same.

Our second point today is **worship**. I would like you to cast your minds back to the first Christians who devoted themselves to understanding their new faith. They embraced this time, meeting in homes as they broke bread together and as we read from Doctor Luke in today's Acts reading, they did so with 'glad and sincere hearts'. Every day they continued to meet together and prayed and spent time talking about Jesus, reminding each other of his teaching and no doubt reflecting on the Old Testament scriptures. And although they met daily, Sundays being the day of Jesus' resurrection soon became the day for getting together with other Christians for a time of corporate worship. Since then worship has taken on many forms. The early Church was essentially Jewish in orientation and as they continued to worship in their homes, they added the Lord's Supper and prayers. It was a time when Lord's Supper was celebrated along with a full scale meal. When Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in **year 313**, the new public image brought with it the building of splendid churches. The simplicity of worship was being lost and ceremony and form became the important thing.

If we **jump ahead 1700 years**, the early settlers in America were experiencing change: The church reverted to worship taking place in schools or the home or somewhere where it could be conducted. Prayer was a simple affair and a sermon would only be given when a minister could be present. How things changed - a revival began. The revival meeting began with a song service of three or more songs chosen to raise the emotional pitch of the congregation. Prayers were offered, but they were intensely personal. An offering was received which fitted the pulse of the service (almost like a heart beating blood through its veins), and the congregation was then prepared for the climax of the service, the evangelistic sermon, which was always followed by some form of altar call. The minister, who was often the best educated member of the community, was expected to carry on these educational and entertainment functions. Churches began to be built like theatres with banked seating, so that what was taking place in the pulpit area could be easily observed. People became more adjusted to being mere spectators in worship.

Move forward to the **year 2020** – As Anglicans, there is change afoot to keep our focus on true biblical teaching through the formation of the Global Anglican Fellowship to which many Anglicans including Bishop Richard are

members. Here in Tasmania we continue to stand alongside the early Christians. We endeavour to replicate what Paul encouraged the Christians in Colossae to do: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God'. As we continue to confess our sins, pray and break bread together, we do so communally, we share worship; just like the early Christians as they gave praise and glory to God. We are facing exciting times. Whatever our worship form, whether it be online, in other buildings or homes, perhaps even at outdoor arenas, whether church is conducted in a traditional or a contemporary style, formal or relaxed, we would do well to remember what the purpose of our worship is - it is to be revered. We read in 1 Peter that we are a spiritual house... a holy priesthood. We are unified through the love of Jesus and we celebrate this.

Our third and final point today is **mission**. At the beginning of my sermon we looked at what Jesus said our direction in life is to be. It is to take two directions - love God and love other people. As the apostles continued to break bread and pray, 'having everything in common' we are told in Acts 2 verse 44, 'everyone around them was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs that they performed', 'they continued to meet with glad and sincere hearts', what happened? The Lord not only added to their number daily, but through their thoughts, words and actions, others saw them as the disciples they were called to be.

The challenge for us in the year 2020 as we show respect to our ever-changing and evolving cultures and differing religions, is having confidence to step out in faith. I wonder what does that mean for you personally? What does that mean for the church? Our gracious God is calling us to live and behave in a way that exemplifies the cost of his sacrifice for us. Meditate on this prayer: *Heavenly Father, you command us to love you and one another. By this everyone will know that we are your disciples. Help us to demonstrate this love through our thoughts, our words and our actions. Open ways for us to spend time with each other, care for each other, be willing to sacrifice for each other, give generously to each other and share a common life all in response to Jesus doing those things for us. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE TAKE AWAY: think about our Mission

1. Love, the first fruit of the Holy Spirit, is a great beginning to our Parish Mission "to love, to grow and to share."
2. We love in two directions - toward God and toward others.
3. Being a parish unified in love, worship and mission we demonstrate this love through our thoughts, words and actions.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS:

- For the appointment of a new Rector for our parish
- For parishioners in Aged Care homes and for those who care for them.
- For the ministry of our Connect groups
- For the work of City Mission and our ministry of providing groceries

FROM THE MINISTER:

Our parish has been amongst the first to resume congregational worship. On Sunday at St Thomas's we had 23 at the 8,30 am and 15 at the 10 am service. There were 18 at the 10 am service at St Barnabas's which was conducted by Andrew Koerbin. This coming Sunday I will be at St Barnabas's and Leonie will lead the St Thomas's services.

Our Parish Annual meeting will be on Sunday 23rd August at St Thomas'. This year the reports will be available on Sunday 16th August so you can consider them prior to the meeting. Hilary will be sending out reminders to the groups to send in their reports no later than 9th August so they can be collated, and remember that brief, succinct reports are the most readable.

Parish Council needs your help. Lesley Salter is garnering feedback and ideas about weekly worship in its various manifestations and June Wright is seeking feedback and ideas about Connect groups. This will help in planning our church's way forward in an unpredictable and changing world.

With the love of Jesus
Andrew Lake

phone: 0487903363