

Treasure

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Revd Linda Anchell

27th July 2008, Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11; Romans 8.26-39; Matthew 13:44-58

From the collect that we prayed this morning:

"O God, the fount of all wisdom, you have revealed to us in Christ the hidden treasure of the pearl of great price: grant to us your Spirit's gift of discernment..." [show boxes of "treasure"]

If these boxes contained "the Kingdom of God" what is the "treasure" that is contained inside them?

Can I go any further than to quote Paul?

" I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In the readings today, we have parables, illustrations, of the kingdom of heaven, some very precious, like the pearl of great price, others perhaps more dark, more mysterious...

Two of today's stories from Jesus are about TREASURE; Treasure found serendipitously or treasure actively sought out. But it is treasure which is so special, that it is worth EVERYTHING.

These two people sell **everything they have** to secure the treasure.

and *that* is what the kingdom of heaven is like. **It's about god... not about us But that gives us the freedom to live our lives. That is worth searching for!** A totally focussed athlete shows us someone who will use every ounce of their being to achieve a goal.

Most of us have lives to live!

We do see something special in their struggles and that can inspire *us* to new heights...

Can I ask: what is it that gets *you* enthusiastic; bubbling over, enthralled and inspired? that energises... and yes, I know all too well that actual energy is not always available even for these consuming passions.

a life lived positively, fully, joyously and creatively...

is this the Kingdom of Heaven? It isn't always possible for us is it.?

Illness; grief, loneliness, fear... perhaps we know them only too well. Let me get back to them a bit later.

Rob has given me a gift this week. It is always a privilege to prepare a sermon. To delve into the texts and prayers and the hymns for the day. To drill through them and see what precious oil might emerge! and like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." we can bring out new and old scriptures, new and old understandings of the world.

What really excites me is when I am given "new eyes for seeing". It doesn't happen all that often, but these texts have been mulled over and interpreted by scribes for many thousands of years. And where many eyes have searched out meaning, there are many ways to see.

How do we read the Bible? It's a question I read in the foyer on Wednesday. It is pertinent to this. [It was in *The Waiapu News* I read a quote:]

Anglicans haven't spent much time together examining how differently they read the Bible. But two recent national conferences have signalled this is work long overdue. Through different eyes and understandings of Scripture, the same text can produce radically different results. And for a church that claims to base its life and behaviour on Scripture, that spells trouble ahead.

To do the task which is set before me today, I need to read the bible by bringing "out what is new and what is old." *Both*.

The Jacob story is the Old Testament reading today. In this season after Pentecost, we have two possible Old Testament readings, with a psalm which reflects whichever reading is chosen. This year, the story of Jacob is set week by week, but alternative readings which apply more closely to the New Testament reading are possible. There is a choice between *lectio continuo*; a continuous story, or *lectio selecta* selected readings. (a bit of Latin for something "old"!)

The Jacob story this morning is of course a small piece of a much larger story. Psalm 105 paints a broader picture of the history of Israel.

I don't know what Doug will do next week; he might confound the whole thing and celebrate Stephen instead of the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost! We do have many choices!

But next week's reading about Jacob tells why he is renamed "Israel". When we read the psalm do we see Israel as a person, a patriarch, an ancestor; or as a people? or as a modern nation state? Question how you read these things.

This week's Genesis reading is perhaps easier, although a bit perplexing. Jacob is a trickster, he has survived by his wits and with trickery since birth. Today he is the one tricked. It is a very human story; not one for us to take as a template for how to live our own lives, in a very different society, but it is a life. My informant on all things "Genesis" is Avivah Zornberg. She uncovers the passions of these lives we learn about in this history. She says of Jacob that he is the first lover and the first worker in our texts.

Not the first one to love; but the first to be smitten, to "fall in love at first sight". And for that he pays. He surrenders his freedom to work, for Rachel. He works for a reward. Not the toil of the farmer or hunter, but the restricted work which hopes to earn a reward from the "boss". And he is tricked.

Jacob's story is a story of learning to face his fears and grow into a fullness of life. Grief, loneliness, fear, they all loomed large in Jacob's life and had to be faced and lived through.

Just before the Lambeth conference, Bishop Gene Robinson said: "the opposite of love is not hate, but fear." Last week Brian said: "It is love that gets rid of fear."

I have focussed on what the kingdom of heaven might actually make our lives into...
[I have been making a mistake!]

Paul's words are about the love of god! Echoing Bishop Gene then I am sure we can say that God does not *hate*, does not *fear* us; but do we know the love that god has? Can we live our lives knowing that we are loved. we don't have to earn that love, we don't have to learn it, or understand it... we are, *you are* loved...

The kingdom of God, the love of god; is not a treasure we possess; it possesses us. It is something that grasps us. and that makes all the difference.

"I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Amen