

Sermon 19 October 2014
'God in the Heart-beat of life' Honouring Age Sunday
Psalm 99 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Prayer: God in the heartbeat of our lives, be our comfort and guide as we wonder about faith and life issues and as we listen to the ancient people of Israel and our own wise ones seeking to make you real in our lives and so be able to share the joy of your presence easily by love and with hope. Amen.

This is our Honouring Age Sunday and in the amazing way of God it is themed 'God in the Heart beat of life'. The more I think about the theme-title given to us for today the more it grows on me. We are here to celebrate life-times of God being the centre of our living, the heart pumping life around, the beat to which we have marched? Walked? Journeyed for many years – and if we combine our years – centuries!

What wisdom is stored within this room – this morning, such knowledge of the ways of God in the middle of our lives, such experience of the presence of the Holy One – and in all honesty, experience of the absence *for whatever reason* but absence of the Holy One and yet through it all we are here and we honour life, today.

To honour life is an attitude of faith – based on our relationship with one another and with our God. It is not only contained in our scriptures but one we are taught to copy / model our living on – for instance in our two scriptures this morning we have had the examples of Moses, Aaron, Samuel, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy offered to us as people who centred their lives in God, in Christ.

^{*1} Moses, Aaron, and Samuel are examples of people who are in a living relationship with God; who call on God *which might* translate today for us into – they were best buddies, face-booking, twitter, snap-chatting all the time.... We know they were in a live-faith-relationship because the communication was two-way, **God answered them.** (v7)

Not only was the talking two-way but their living was reciprocal as well – God guided by physical presence in the Pillar of cloud throughout their Exodus wanderings, through statutes and decrees and by loving with an *ancient version* of tough love. V8 says: “8 O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, **though** you punished their misdeeds.” *I am always* a little unsure of how to address the issue of our ability to remember the good things and accept God's blessings **when they suit** and how we reject God, when we are called to account for our actions – or when God says no to a 'want'. It is even sadder for me when I hear a sense of abandonment by God because the 'want' wasn't answered.

It is not my definition of love when the 'other' gives everything and the "I" takes all; never giving back, never recognising the gift, never recognising the giver, and sadder still never recognising the **greater** gift of love and reciprocity. God's no or punishing our misdeeds is not abandonment or rejection, it is because God loves us enough to **care** about our behaviour: toward each other **and** toward the "Holy" at our life's-centre. Cv

I said earlier that we'd been given a pattern to model relationship on 6 people; well, the Old Testament Scholar ^{*1}H Wallace tells us there is another layer in this psalm that contributes to our teaching. He says that: “The psalm is a three way dialogue between a worship leader, the people and the Lord. However, it is not always clear who is speaking to whom... It keeps alternating between statements about the Lord and the people, statements made to the Lord, and others which could be uttered by the people. So he suggests that because of its structure “it might have been used as part of a liturgy in ancient Israel.”

When the people gathered in worship, using this psalm they were honouring the way God involved himself in the lives of his people, and through the people's leaders King and prophet and never lost sight

that God is God and they are His people. Private and public honouring of the central position of God for life enables faith's heart to keep beating, not only in the good times but also when the storms of life hit.

When we have such wisdom gathered together – centuries of it – like today! We also have lots of experience of the storms of life – and some of us will come very close to understanding what the people Paul was writing to were experiencing. Some of us have never experienced persecution that results in death, never experienced what it is to come to God – in Christ from a religion that worships idols, never experienced making a choice of life or death choice because of believing in Jesus.... But Paul's people did know and it is into that culture that Paul writes what we know as the earliest / the first document of the New Testament.

If you thought the Gospels were the earliest writings of the 2nd Testament – nope! This letter from Paul to the people of Thessalonica is and *quite possibly* **they** as a gathering of Gods people of Jesus they were ^{*2} less than a year old. The storms of this faith were hard hitting and violent but it didn't stop them sharing their faith in Jesus, growing the church. Listen again to the ways they shared. V3 “your work produced by **faith**, your labour prompted by **love**, and your endurance inspired by **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Faith, Love and Hope – the big three essential ingredients Paul says to building a faith that holds in the storms of life. In this letter they are not just ‘concepts’ – lofty ideals, goals to head towards... They are grounded in everyday life – work produced by faith, labour prompted by love, and endurance inspired by the Holy Spirit. There is no separation of church / Sunday observance and daily life here – their work is produced by faith, prompted by love, inspired by the Holy Spirit. God through Christ is in the centre of the life of these people – Paul says so.

If you / we / they didn't hear that, Paul repeats is this way: “our gospel came to you **not simply** with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. **You know** how we lived among you for your sake. **6 You became imitators** of us and of the Lord;” Paul is saying that God in Christ is right in the middle of this – the Gospel – or good news of Jesus was shared not just as ‘words’ – but with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

It was real in Paul, Silvanus and Timothy's lives so the people in Thessalonica believed and imitated that lifestyle, **receiving the message with joy** given by the Holy Spirit.” 7 And so (Paul writes:) you became a model to all the believers..... your faith in God became known everywhere”.

I have a *sneaky doubt* that the Thessalonians didn't see themselves as evangelists, as preachers, in fact I suspect they were so busy trying to survive and stay alive – stay breathing, with hearts beating that evangelising was way down the list – **but what was happening** in their lives could not be mistaken. **Joy cannot be denied, faith that is at work, love that underpins it, Spirit inspired hope** in a better future all these and more signs of God in Christ present in the middle of life – well the news *bubbles out* – it's good despite the storms.....

We remember good – and we share good – right? – Show video clip....

That was good right? I want you to share with someone who didn't come to church today the sight of a Huge piano that has to be played with feet – and played energetically. And may you then find it a simple matter to say: I saw it at church – we were in worship and had fun! We celebrated life with word, music, food, friendship. We shared work prompted by love, as the team who have created our morning tea will tell you. May we be inspired by the Holy Spirit to offer hope to others because God, the heartbeat of our community has gifted us Jesus. May the joy of receiving him overflow from our lives into the life of the world, just like our faith ancestors. Amen.