

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthian 5:6-17

Theme: “*We walk by faith, not by sight*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

One of the great oddities is how we understand belief. One of the most popular sayings, certainly as I was growing up was, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” How odd that we should only believe something when we can actually prove that something is true. It is odd because if we can prove something by observing it, by seeing it, we no longer believe it, but instead we *know* it to be true.

The key to Christian living is not living according to what we see with our eyes, but rather to walk with eyes of faith.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

What we see is not always reliable

If we live by sight, what we see is what we get. The problem is that we can easily misinterpret what we see for many different reasons. They may be that we only see part of the picture as it unfolds before us. Perhaps we bring certain prejudices to the very things we see and so the manner in which we interpret these things will have a particular bias. An example would be the way in which my son Alex and I watch the Richmond Tigers play a game of football. Alex hopes they will win because he feels my pain every time they lose again. I cling to the hope this game will be different than so many others I’ve seen over the past 28 years because I am a passionate supporter and this is *my* team. Our interest in what we observe has a major impact on how we interpret what we see.

It is worth noting how what we see and give emphasis to has also affected the Holy Scriptures as they have been passed down to us. The first three gospel accounts in the New Testament are called the Synoptic gospels. This means they form a consensus view of Christ’s ministry whilst he was here on earth. Together they paint a more vivid picture than any one gospel account on its own. Yet there sometimes appears to be inconsistencies between these accounts. How can this be in God’s Word? In the first instance, I’m not suggesting for a moment that the Bible is inaccurate. In fact, given the differences in what is recorded gives credibility to the gospels. If you wanted to corrupt a witnesses account, you would gather all the witnesses together and make sure they all told the same story. The value in questioning several witnesses is each person brings what *they* saw and they give their evidence. As long as the evidence doesn’t contradict what others have also revealed, a more colourful picture is created. This is the gift that God has given us through the gospels of the New Testament. Eye witness accounts that support one another, painting a more colourful picture of how Christ came to his people to bring God’s salvation to life for all people.

So the emphasis that each one of bring to what we see with our eyes may be skewed for any number of reasons. There are two other problems with relying on what our eyes see to guide us along life’s journey. Can you see what they are? Firstly, what happens if our eyes aren’t working properly? If we are only to believe in what we see, what does that mean for a person who is born blind? What would this mean for a person who loses their eyesight as they age or through an accident? The second problem is the question of our other senses. If we rely too much on our eyesight, what do we lose in our journey of life that is revealed through our sense of hearing, or smell, or touch, or taste? The beauty of living in this three dimensional world is that God has given us five sense by which we may interpret and experience the world in all its glory, and all its shortcomings.

As each one of us journey through life as individuals we look and experience the world in which we live and God’s Word warns us to walk by faith, not by sight. The gift of the Holy Spirit which brings us faith enables us to see God’s work in all that we see or do. We are given a new set of glasses through which we see the world.

Our faith relies on something more sure than sight

Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians that word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. In other words, the world which saw the person of Jesus executed on the cross in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago can only give witness to his death. It makes no sense of Jesus Christ being raised to new life three days after his death. And so those who do not believe in the good news concerning Jesus Christ rely on what they ‘see’ with

their own eyes and the only logical conclusion they can come to is that Jesus died, people don't come back to life and so the Christian faith is either wrong or else it is a fraud. And so locked into their unbelief, Paul is right to describe such people as perishing.

As Christians, surely our approach, our viewpoint is quite different. As those who have had God's faith poured into our hearts we don't see and interpret or guess what the news of Jesus' resurrection account might mean for us. We don't have to create our own meaning – you know the attitude of, “Well it works for me.” Instead as Christians *we know*, as Paul writes to us.

This is why we are of good courage in the face of adversity. This is why we can deal with the suffering and death of loved ones, or even as we face our own mortality – not because we think or guess or hope that everything will turn out okay. Instead, together with Paul, we can say, “We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6-8). In other words, as Christians, we know that we are called to live *in* the world but we are not *of* the world. Our eternal home is not here on earth and it is certainly not here on earth, trapped in an earthen grave. Our eternal home is in the place that God has prepared for each one of you.

None of this will make sense to those who don't believe in Jesus Christ and God's saving grace – but these are the hard facts and we know them to be true through the faith that God has put into each one of you. God now gives you a pledge that is delivered through the Holy Spirit and that is the gift of faith which comes to us through the Sacraments. Real faith is given to each of God's children through the gift of Holy Baptism and this real faith is sustained and nurtured each time we receive the Lord's body and blood through Holy Communion. And the proof of this faith is that no-one can confess that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. So if you pray to God, if you confess faith in him through the words of the Apostle's Creed, if you willingly hear and read God's Word, know that you have the gift of the Holy Spirit which delivers this saving faith to *you*.

Therefore Faith creates our reality

As Christians, as God's children, you are not perishing. Even though our mortal bodies will die, this is not the end of the story but in fact the beginning of living our lives in the true fullness that God created us for. We will be blessed to see God face to face and no longer will we live by faith but rather we will see and experience God in all his glory. This is the story that we now share with others through our faithful witness. This is the story of faith and Christian love that we proclaim every time we reach out in love to support one another or whenever we support and care for those God puts before us.

Paul writes, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (5:14-15). This means it is no longer we who control ourselves or the path we tread, instead it is Christ who guides you along the path he has mapped out for you. And this along this path we shine Christ's light so others may follow his lead.

This week has been a trying week in which many people have been preparing for Greg Wharton's funeral, including myself. My thoughts have been dominated, not by Greg, but by Christ and that he died not only for Greg but for me and for you and for all God's baptised children. Nothing can change the truth of this good news for those who are led by the Holy Spirit. So together will Paul and the whole Christian church we say, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (5:17). This is the truth we believe for our brother Greg. This is the truth for you.

And the may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.