Sermon

Pentecost IX

11/8/19

Eltham

Planned Giving II 2019

**Readings**

Hebrews 11:1-3, 6-8 by faith…

Luke 12:32-40 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

Narrative re giving:

+FSHS

Following the Uluru Statement From The Heart, in 2019, a group of young Indigenous people have gathered in East Arnhem Land for the Youth Forum at Garma Festival (hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation). The forum was facilitated by AIME and resulted in a declaration for the Prime Minister and Education Minister’s across Australia - The Imagination Declaration.

This message was read out by Siena Stubbs, pictured above, on August 5, 10:00am, at the 2019 Garma Festival:

*To the Prime Minister & Education Ministers across Australia,*

*In 1967, we asked to be counted.*

*In 2017, we asked for a voice and treaty.*

*Today, we ask you to imagine what’s possible.*

*The future of this country lies in all of our hands.*

*We do not want to inherit a world that is in pain. We do not want to stare down huge inequality feeling powerless to our fate. We do not want to be unarmed as we confront some of the biggest problems faced by the human race, from rising sea levels, which will lead to significant refugee challenges, to droughts and food shortages, and our own challenges around a cycle of perpetuated disadvantaged.*

*It’s time to think differently.*

*With 60,000 years of genius and imagination in our hearts and minds, we can be one of the groups of people that transform the future of life on earth, for the good of us all.*

*We can design the solutions that lift islands up in the face of rising seas, we can work on creative agricultural solutions that are in sync with our natural habitat, we can re-engineer schooling, we can invent new jobs and technologies, and we can unite around kindness…..*

*We are not the problem, we are the solution.*

*Garma Youth Forum & the AIME team.*

*5 August 2019*

This is an inspirational statement of faith, a statement which sets a vision into the future with hope in what may come to pass. It’s also a statement, a panegyric, a canticle which proclaims the humble and meek being raised up, and the mighty cast down from their thrones, and as such, has a prophetic edge to it in its call.

We’ve just heard the words of Jesus, “Do not worry little flock, for it’s your Father in heaven’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom… Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In these words, Jesus is emphatic that the realm of God is beyond all other things, a future it’s worth giving our all to see – and what’s more, God will more than honour the giving of our all to see the realm of God come, because it is God’s good pleasure to give the kingdom to Jesus’ followers; the desire that we seek first the realm of God comes from God and is stirred in our hearts.

Now that’s a grandiose, glorious and somewhat spiritualized claim, and it begs the confronting question: do we take Jesus seriously here? Do we go home and organize to sell all that we have in order to give alms, as he says, ie, give it all to charity, to the poor? We rebel against that. For literally what would we have to live on? We too need a roof over our heads and food on the table, and it’s a matter not just of pride but of civic responsibility almost that if we can do that for ourselves, we do it, and not be a burden to society.

But you see, to think that way misses the point entirely, and ignores the fact that giving alms is not throwing a few coins in the tin of someone flogging the Big Issue. Selling all we have and giving it away, almsgiving, is about the radical reorientation of our society and our expectations. Jesus is being exactly this radical: you see, almsgiving is all about power and power relations. Out of the wealth of what I have I can give a few dollars to a charity, the church for its ministry, to mission agencies. But that’s a power transaction: I as rich am giving to (you) the poor. What Jesus is suggesting is empowerment of the poor, downtrodden, oppressed – along the lines, in fact, I think, of the Imagination Declaration from those young Aboriginal people this week.

And this is not a passive thing. It’s something that is done in faith and hope. “Making purses” that don’t wear out, fit to hold unfailing treasure of heaven… That’s about taking steps forward in faith. And that means being ready, being expectant. Expectancy that God’s going to work, looking actively for God’s coming in our midst, looking for the realm of God where it springs up. And the good news, Jesus says, is that it’s like a bunch of slaves who are super ready and prepared for the master’s return at any minute. When the master comes, because they have invested all they have in the hope of the master’s return, Jesus says, the power relationship itself is inverted: and the master will get the slaves to sit, and serve them dinner. Because this is how God is! God places that hope and expectancy in our hearts with which we can look for the realm of God, and rewards that expectancy with superabundant return – treasure which is everlasting because it’s nothing less than looking on the face of God. God and the realm of God is our greatest treasure.

Last week the message in relation to our giving was about our complete dependency on God, that all that we are and have comes from God and returns to God, passing through our hands not to be grasped but stewarded. This week the clear message to us about our giving is this: what do we need to give in order to look expectantly towards, work towards, and be prepared for the coming realm of God, for meeting Jesus where we find him gone before us in our world? Is this our chief treasure, seeking the realm of God?

I’m not talking here just about money and how much you give to St Margaret’s. This is about the whole of our lives, the orientation of our hearts and minds and wills. What we do with our money comes from that. And I think Jesus is pretty clear: until we have our priorities straight we’re caught in the old status quo power relationships of domination, and are not living in the realm of God in which power is there to be shared and given in empowerment of others.

As you consider what you’re willing to give to see the realm of God coming through the work here at St Margaret’s, I wonder where your treasure is. I’ve been reflecting recently about where my treasure is: my investment, my heart I suppose, is to see God’s purposes come about in and through St Margaret’s – through things like the prayer project, the music programme, the work Do Justice is doing around justice for Aboriginal folk, and how we connect people of all ages with a deeper experience of faith in Jesus. I yearn to see all who come through our doors growing in faith, taking brave steps to trust God’s provision, learning more, going deeper in experience of God’s presence and closeness, and to see lives transformed so that we all each of us and together more closely come to bear the image of Christ, who is the ikon of the invisible God. And because I am invested in that, I have committed more than 10% of my resources to this end – most of it through planned giving as a direct debit, but also to a number of other charities and institutions who are able to build the realm of God in ways I can’t with my two hands.

So ponder this in the coming weeks: How are you investing your all in the realm of God? Where is your treasure, your heart? What’s your orientation? Are you looking with expectancy, hope, for the realm of God to come? Are you ready for its advent if it were to burst upon you tomorrow? Is your faith and trust in God – not just to provide (God has promised us nothing less than the fullness of the realm of God!) but to do in and through us more than we can imagine, desire, or deserve? And in the light of these reflections, that’s when to look at how we use our resources – our time, our finances, our energies, our thoughts, our hopes, our prayers, our life choices. Not all of that needs to be through our giving programme here at St Margaret’s, although part of the reflection we’re invited to at this time is to consider how much we’re giving, and also reflect on whether we can take another step up in faith – give 1% more. But more than this, what I do hope – expect even? – is that each and every person sitting here is someone who is eagerly expecting and watching for the coming realm of God in our midst. And my prayer is that this hope and faith, and with it, love and charity which gives power to others, is increased, multiplied, made superabundant – not for our glory, not only that St Margaret’s may be a church known for faith and hope and love, but more that this place may be a beacon shining in our world, through which the bright light of God’s glory beams, and is never dimmed.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**