

Sermon 15 September 2013  
'Faith is about God in Christ' Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28 Luke 15:1-10

Prayer: We are here Lord, to listen, learn, wait and be replenished by you. We come because our faith is about you in Christ and despite all other voices and words we know it is foolishness to deny you. You are the face we need to see, the voice we need to hear, THE presence who welcomes and forgives and lovingly equips us to be that presence in our world. Amen.

As most of you by now will have realised, September is St John's Thanksgiving month. This is a re-occurring theme for another Sunday until the 29<sup>th</sup> which is our Thanksgiving Sunday. *It has been* a tradition of St Johns since the early days to make an annual financial gift to the Lord's work here at St Johns that is over and above our regular tithing / giving. This year it has been agreed we will put our thanks offerings towards updating our heating needs in 'here' and the rest of the building. As an aside I need to say it is unlikely we will be going as far as installing some kind of air pump / air conditioning system, professional quotes put that cost around \$20,000.00. Church leadership is not convinced it would be demonstrating responsible stewardship to do that, unless the Lord really lays on someone's heart that dedication and level of 'giving'. We have been well blessed here by the level of giving the Lord does lay upon our hearts, so it is with real thanksgiving we observe this month. I would like to say thank you for the gifts received to date.

I am going to invite you to do some work this morning. By now most of you will have seen the video 'God's Pies' so you know on one level what it is saying to you. But this morning I want us to look at it thinking about the relationships it portrays. The characters with each other; with the 'Me-Man'; *with God*. Who looks after who / what? Who is gracious? Who attempts to care / be just / think of others?

Show Video:

Like it or not our world is reflected in that video which is why it has an 'ouch' factor', but this video doesn't define **us** any more than our world defines us. We can shut off to its message or we can ask ourselves how may we hear its message and allow it to help us be better people in our world? The **work of being** God's people in the world is not for the faint-hearted – it is not for those wanting an easy slide through life. We have a measuring rod against which we are called to measure our lives and when – *not if*, **when** we see how we come up to short it is our decision what choice to make: God's way – the hard way or not.

One of the voices from *that* video is calling us to recognise ourselves within it, our God in Christ desires that we are honest with ourselves and face up to our 'worldliness' and if that worldliness is creating tension within us or causing a break with Gods ways in our lives / with how we know Jesus tells us to live then we are to 'see' it and **do** something about returning to God's ways. One of the church words for this process of recognition and return is repentance. It is to recognise the sin **within** and reach out to God trusting in the promises of faith that **we are forgiven**, our depleted spiritual resources replenished and in grace, we are welcomed home.

The challenge of being 'at home with God' is that we soon discover ourselves back doing all the things we are **supposed to do** – living life: meeting friends/ going to school / Uni / kindly ☺, doing 'work' / meeting friends... And it is our job to offer the **grace of transformation** we have experienced to those we are with. **Our job** to offer grace to those we disagree with, find shocking, wrong or evil – as Jesus did. It is our job to speak of a different way to live – one that does not ignore the needs of our neighbour, does not absolve humanity from the depletion of the earth's resources, does not say self / me is more important than anyone/ thing else... **does say** – we are not alone, we have been given the most amazing world and resources to share and look after so that everyone has a piece of God's pie's.

And so that can happen we need to learn how to hear God's voice louder than any other. Choices of who to listen to abound, decisions of who to follow multiply each day. It is God's voice we were

designed to hear and follow first of all. And when we stop listening – Jeremiah, speaking on God's behalf, has nothing good to say to us!

The whole passage is speaking of destruction because 'my people are fools' (vs22). 'They are with our understanding... skilled in doing what is evil –(ouch) ... do not know how to do good (ouch again). Therefore ....' And what Jeremiah foretells is the unwinding of creation as described in Genesis chapter 1. God began by giving the world its form, making lights called stars for the night... bringing mountains and hills into being, and creating life – humanity and animals... All this is wound back until the whole land is desolation, in mourning and dark.... **All because the relationship** with God has failed and the people are not listening or following Him.

Sometimes our scripture is simply scary – 2010 was 100 years since the birth of Rachel Carson, the author of 'Silent Spring', a book that is seen as starting the Environment Movement. She is acknowledged as the most influential environmentalist of all time, but when she first published she was vilified and ridiculed. She used her scientific insight to reveal the extent to which products like DDT / pesticides were destroying ecosystems. Vs 22: 'They are skilled at doing evil and do not know how to do good'. ... and the earth is destroyed as creation is wound back.... Because 'they are fools who do not know me' – says God.

Scholars point to the destruction of the earth as prophesied by Jeremiah to be because the relationship between God and His people had failed. In keeping with our video's pictures it is as if when we do not know the maker of the pie that we devour – we eat it all without sharing, even sharing a piece with the maker! And this is what sin looks like, says our scripture. Sin separates us from each other, from God and God's ways. Sin is signalled by this loss of relationship and **over time** general destruction of all that exists.

This sense of relationship loss is reflected in the language of Jesus, rather than the language of the other religious groups of his day and ours, of 'sin and sinners'. The two parables today exemplify this teaching / theological approach. Jesus is accused of welcoming sinners and even eating with them! Then, *as today* the shared meal was central to being 'together', food was precious and something to be celebrated and enjoyed. What Jesus is doing is putting the focus on people, recognising and valuing them first, rather than a particular act of repentance enabling 'recognition' and giving value. It is Jesus preferred sequence of events that causes the controversy. People have value and are worthy of His love before a theology of repentance is invoked. His love is unconditional. As loved and accepted by him would they – you – us accept his invitation for the future, to be part of his vision for all creation?

Jesus teaches that the loss of one single individual to God is huge. God will do everything possible to gather that 'lost' **one** and bring them home. God in Christ celebrates love and restored relationships and this restoration includes change that results from satisfied seeking. Change because following God in Christ is a better way of life, even if the choice is a hard decision to make and keep. But our God, Jesus tells us is the seeking, yearning **One**, who comes offering a restored relationship and one whom Jesus says will do anything including leaving 99 of his people behind, in order to look for **a lost one**.

I am not sure we can eliminate out of Jesus thinking a knowledge of the loss of capital to the shepherd of one sheep as we say 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' but still Jesus tells us God so wants to be our God and be in loving relationship with us, sharing the earth and it's bounty as per the original design, that he will go chasing 'one alone'. In case we don't get it, Luke shares Jesus teaching about a woman. And here the financial dimension is very present! She loses a coin, and searches until it is found, and then celebrates with a party, such is the delight of success!

Our faith is about this God in Christ. This God, who gives a value to each one of us and looks for and loves us into wholeness and invites us to share all he has made. What is our response? Amen.