

The complexity and simplicity of Christian faith

Rev'd Dr Elizabeth McWhae

Pentecost + 3B 13-6-21: 1 Sam 15.34-16.13, Ps 2, 2 Cor 5.6-10, 14-17, Mk 4.26-34

INTRODUCTION:

As I get older I am more and more aware of the complexity and yet simplicity of our Christian faith. I hope to unpack this idea of complexity and simplicity by starting with these verses from Paul. *For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything else has become new!*

POINT 1:

Understanding the death of Jesus is just as important as understanding his life and resurrection. His death is the pivotal connection between his life and resurrection and our lives. So what is Paul trying to say in these verses. Firstly, he is saying that the death of Jesus was a cosmic event. It was for all humanity, not just those who see themselves as Christians.*we are convinced that one (Christ) has died for all.* This means for all people of all generations and faiths and lack of faiths over all time. So salvation is not an individual event or experience, but something that is communal and universal.

Jesus did not die just for you and me but for everyone. For all people, over all time. I suspect our Western worldview has caused us to see his death through the lens of the individual, but that is not the way Paul saw things. And so he writes *therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.*

This is where things become complex, because we all know that people in our world, and this includes us, often do not live as though they are no longer living for themselves. In fact our whole culture is pretty much averse to this sort of thinking. We are instead told to look after number one, to stand up for ourselves, to get what we deserve, or need, or want, or what is ours. We should be aware that sometimes what we want is not about living for Christ but living for ourselves. It can be very difficult to discern what it means to live for Christ.

Paul is very clear that *if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* Essentially he is saying that we are new creations, whether we realise it or not. And it was Jesus' death that issued in this new life. It was not possible any other way. So death is the starting point for new life in Christ. The complexity here is that death may be physical or emotional, or relate to some loss. There are all sorts of deaths in our lives that are not literal.

POINT 2:

So how do we learn to live for Christ, instead of ourselves? And how do we remember that we and all people are new creations in Christ? Now do you understand why I mentioned complexity? These are really difficult concepts to apply to our lives. They sound good, but they are not easy to achieve. Just ask anyone who is suffering from depression or a catastrophic health problem or whose business is facing

closure due to covid restrictions, and so on.

This is where our readings from Mark's Gospel may be able to help. Both of the parables we heard this morning concern the kingdom of God, which I am going to call a new kingdom in Christ. Both of these parables have to do with growth of a seed. In the first parable it is a seed of grain. In the other it is a seed of mustard. Jesus says that the seed of grain mysteriously grows *he does not know how*. And when the grain is ripe it is harvested by God. So this parable of the grain is about the mysterious growth of the kingdom that happens because God makes it happen. Not the seed or the person, but God. And God is responsible for the harvest, nobody else. The kingdom of God grows mysteriously by the power of God and God is the harvester.

The second parable of the mustard seed, focuses upon a tiny seed which becomes a huge mustard tree. Or as Paul Kelly writes, *from little things, big things grow*. Jesus' point is that the kingdom may start small but it ends up huge so *that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade*. The kingdom of God may look small, but it is far-reaching and always growing.

Both of these parables remind us that to live no longer for ourselves, but for Christ, we need to remember that this is a mysterious process that God is directing and it is a process that may appear small but is always growing and expanding.

POINT 3:

How do we practise being the new creations that Paul wants us to become and how do we see the kingdom of God at work in our world? Well, it is not always easy. But if we live by faith that we are a new creation in Christ, and so is everyone we come across, then it does deeply impact the way we see the world and our place in it and what God is up to.

How we view ourselves and how we view others determines how we

live our lives, what we consider to be important, what our values are, and what sort of contribution we will make to our world.

CONCLUSION:

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are new creations in Christ. In doing this he is also reminding us that we too are new creations in Christ. We live in a mysterious kingdom that is constantly growing and expanding by the power of God. Or as that annoying bird in the Bank SA add says: LET'S DO THIS. Let's see ourselves as new creations in Christ, so that we can live the life God in Christ wants us to. Or as the Psalmist says *Some put their trust in chariots and some in horses: but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*

Amen.