

Secure in the Lord

Readings: Psalm 63, Luke 13:1 – 9

There are some hot topics that people get passionate about and love to debate.

Can you think of some?

- Euthanasia
- Genetic modification
- Human rights
- Donald Trump
- Locally – the dam

Christians have their own hot issues (sometimes they overlap). What might they be?

- Creation vs evolution
- Israel (the Palestinian Christians don't usually get a mention)
- The last days
- Homosexuality

What about the in-house important things? Like:

Youth group

- Our new building - the Lantern
- Pews
- Rosters
- Morning tea

Some of these things are really important. They affect the future of humanity. Others are important too because they affect our Christian faith. Other things are not that important but they impact how we run this Church.

Some things are interesting and important too but we can't do much about them.

Maybe some things are totally irrelevant and simply distract us from focusing on who we are in Christ and what he has called us to.

I invite you to take a moment to think about what the most important thing in your life is. I'll give you a hint - take into account all the things you pay attention to, give your money and your time to, worry about and talk to others about.

Discard the answers you know you should give and take a reality check. What is really important to you now?

We have all heard of David; King, poet and friend of God. Like all of us David had his ups and downs with the Lord. He was disobedient and got focused on other things at times. Can you recall some of the things that took David's attention away from God?

- Bathsheba – lust
- Taking a census when commanded not to – power / reliance on resources other than God

David is human like us; easily distracted like us. But when he wrote Psalm 63 he was fully focused on what mattered most. It seems when he wrote this song, he was fleeing King Saul and had found refuge in the rugged Negev region.

Physically David was anything but secure. And yet he is totally secure in the Lord's hands and what's more; he knows it – at least at this point in time.

So what is the key to his security?

Some would say it was because he had seen a vision of the Lord. Whether or not David is talking literally, he says "I have seen you in the sanctuary and gazed upon your power and your glory."

Seeing a vision had to help, without doubt!

But why was the vision granted to him? Lots of people don't get a vision. Some don't ever get any kind of sense that God is there – never experience anything from God. There can be many reasons for that lack of experience but it is a reality for some. And a choice is made:

I believe and will follow anyway or
Well, God can't be real so I'll look elsewhere.

I am speculating I know, but I'd like to suggest that David was granted a vision of the Lord because he was sincerely seeking. He writes "I earnestly search for you." The Lord knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts and rewards those who seek him. (Jer 17:10, Rev 2:23)

I'd also like to suggest that the vision is wonderful and helpful but that ultimately it is not the vision that brings security to David. No, it is the Lord himself who brings security.

Your unfailing love is better than life v3
You satisfy me more than the richest feast v5
... you are my helper v7

It is the Lord himself, not visions, nor words, nor wonderful acts, but the Lord himself that brings security to David. "I cling to you; your right hand holds me securely" he declares in verse v8.

Notice that, after getting his focus right, David can go on to talk about his concerns with the Lord. He is concerned about 'those plotting to destroy' him and rightly so. Because his focus is on the Lord though, he can place those people and his fears and insecurities in God's hands. He can say with certainty that the evil doers will be dealt with.

He dwells for a moment on the idea of them going down to the earth, dying by the sword, becoming the food of jackals. It's appealing to dwell on that right?

When I was a teenager we had a saying we'd trot out if someone annoyed us or let us down. "May the fleas of a thousand camels infest your armpits" we'd say with glee.

I don't see any signs of glee coming from David; but I do see signs of trust in God - and a reaffirmation of his relationship with Him.

He finished the psalm by making a statement of faith - the King and all who trust in the Lord will praise God while the evildoers won't be able to do that.

(While David's reference to the King is in the third person, perhaps it is a statement of faith in his own calling by God. That might be reading too much into it though.)

So Psalm 63 focuses us very firmly on the Lord and gives us a great example of how not to be distracted.

Let's turn to Luke 13. It's found in the midst of a section where Jesus gives a series of warnings: about being hypocritical, the folly of trusting in riches and that they should ready for when he comes again.

Jesus is trying to point the people in the right direction – towards his Kingdom. Immediately after the passage Jesus demonstrates the Kingdom by breaking the rules and healing on the Sabbath. Needless to say the establishment is not at all pleased.

As an aside, in this week's Lent study we studied the story of the rich young ruler who couldn't put Jesus first. After the guy left Jesus crestfallen, Jesus explains to his disciples what will happen for those who do put Jesus first. They will receive amazing riches (not the kind they will expect but riches in being part of God's family) and they will also receive persecution.

That persecution becomes very real as Jesus hears of some Jews who were killed in the act of worshipping God. Now remember the Jewish worldview was that God rewards good people, often financially, and that those who suffered deserved it.

Jesus challenges their way of thinking. Perhaps the people were feeling a false sense of security "Well we are alright because we haven't done anything to deserve death". Perhaps that led to a sense of smugness and being judgemental.

Jesus puts them right. "They are no worse sinners than any of you." Jesus is being quite confrontational to the people around him; they too need to repent just as the ones who died needed to.

Remember that repenting means doing a complete 180 degree turn. Jesus tells them they need to turn from the way they are living now. They need to follow him completely and in the next story he goes further.

In recounting the parable of the unproductive fig tree Jesus points out that not only do the people need to be following him; they also need to be fruit bearing. And there's a warning - it ain't looking good for those who don't.

Yet even when Jesus is being challenging, he is reassuring. He gives them a real shake up but then he illustrates his Father's mercy.

All through throughout history the story is repeated. The Jews/Jesus followers stuff up. Judgement should come. God is merciful.

The Jewish people weren't being fruitful. They weren't following the Lord wholeheartedly. Nor were they caring for the widow, the orphan and the alien as they should have been.

They deserved to be cut off.

So Jesus came. He came offering forgiveness, mercy and a new life. He came offering a totally new way to live in his upside down Kingdom.

He came offering opportunities for them to follow him and to live fruitful lives.

This Lent he comes again, offering the same opportunities. The question is: Will we take up his offer? Will we follow him no matter what? Will we give up our own selfish ways to serve others?

The story of the rich young ruler is not about riches at all. Rather it is about what is the most important thing – the thing at the core of our being.

Is it Jesus or is it something else?

Jesus tells us we are all sinful, we all need to turn to him. We need to do that in ways that go way beyond the superficial.

We cannot live the way we want and just add Jesus to that. We can't just carry on our merry way and expect Jesus to add an extra blessing to whatever we want to do.

Jesus has come to strip away the things that are not of him and to fill us with the things that are of him.

This Lenten season, let's allow ourselves to be challenged, to really think and pray about how deep we want to go with him.

Let's repent of the things we need and be secure in him as we focus on the Lord and on his Kingdom. Let's strip away the distractions and things that are unimportant.