“**Talking Tough, Expecting Justice”** (St. Georges for 18/08/19)

*Readings:* Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19.

Hebrews 11:29-12:2 Luke 12:49-56

Winter is drawing to a close. We are still standing in winter, but we know that Spring is coming. We see the signs: days are lighter, warmer, longer. Trees are shooting, and buds hold promise of what is to come. You can smell the Daphne, see the Camellia and Magnolia flowers.

During the winter, the gardeners among us have been preparing the ground and planting fruit trees, vegetables and herbs to provide nourishment initially for their own families and the joy of sharing the fruit of their labours with others.

In the Isaiah and Psalms readings we understand that the vineyard God planted is the house of Israel. Initially both readings are telling the same story: God cleared the land, prepared it and planted the vineyards. In the Isaiah reading the vineyard was planted in fertile, prepared ground and carefully tendered, but the vineyard produced only wild fruit, or (in other versions) bad fruit, so its protection was removed and it was made desolate.

Today’s message is entitled: “Talking Tough and Expecting Justice”. Many times God sent out his prophets with his words of truth for his people, but they would not hear it.

In Psalm 80 we read that the Israelites had flourished in the place God had planted them; the picture Asaph paints is of the vineyard proliferating, running rampant. God then removed their protection. Sometimes God does this, he allows the walls of protection to be removed from our lives. He does not send the difficulty, but he sees and knows it coming. He allows an opportunity for us to seek his face. He wants us to look to him, his desire is for us to be centred in relationship with him, not all the other things that can consume our energy and passion.

Asaph the author of this Psalm sees their desolation as coming from the hand of God. He states that God has broken down their protection, and he urges God to look upon them and restore them. Asaph is very graphic he says “your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish”. Then he says “Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself”. Asaph’s immediate intention in his song-writing is to ask God to show favour and honour to their king. Asaph may not have been aware, but he was also speaking prophetically about the Son of Man on God’s right hand – who he has raised up for himself – Christ Jesus the Saviour.

He finishes with “Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved”.

We might also call out to God in that way in the midst of our distress or circumstances that are bewildering: “God, where are you?” Look at this situation, turn your face towards us…”

God had a purpose for the people of Israel, they were to live a life centred around him. He is their God, and they are his people. Jesus’ life on earth had a purpose – to reconcile mankind back to the Father, back to the place where they were centred in him, where he was their life.

Hebrews 11 speaks of those heroes who were **commended**, after their life, for their great faith yet none of them received what had been promised. Or what they had received was only a foretaste of what would come through Christ Jesus.

God promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations and that through him, all the nations of the world would be blessed. He didn’t see that promise come to fruition. But he knew that God would fulfil that promise through his line. God was going to graft the gentiles into the family line. Abraham saw Isaac, the rest he had to take on faith.

Those that have gone before us have made a place for us to stand, by what they held onto and believed by faith. God may have given you a word, a prophesy or promise and you’ve been believing for it, but haven’t yet seen it come to pass. You may not. But can you believe it by faith, for your children or perhaps your grandchildren? Can you continue to believe God it so that they can have the benefit, just like others have done for us?

These heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 are the unseen “great crowd of witnesses” that surround us. We don’t just live a good life in this world, but we also belong, through Jesus, to the kingdom of God. When God sent Jesus, his anointed one, to demonstrate his love; and to be the saviour of the world the world didn’t want him. His truth highlighted the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day. His goodness highlighted the sin of mankind. The crowds wanted to see the signs, wonders and miracles; they wanted to hear his teachings, but few wanted their life radically changed.

Jesus is the King of the **Kingdom of Light** coming into the world and disrupting the darkness. Light and dark cannot coexist. Where you choose the light - who is Christ, and bring that into your family, your workplace and community you will be in conflict with the dark. Christ Jesus’ words are divisive, because they are truth. In the Luke passage Jesus’ states “Do you think I came to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but division…” and he describes families divided against themselves. On first reading this statement seems in direct contrast with Jesus’ purpose. Jesus, is referred to as the Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9:6; and in John14:27 Jesus says “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. This is not a comment by Jesus. It is a directive. He knows things will be difficult, challenging and unsettling. He commands us not to allow our hearts to be troubled or afraid. Jesus never promises an easy life. But he did say “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

In the Luke reading Jesus speaks to the crowds about the weather and seasons: ‘you know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, how is it you don’t know how to interpret this present time? This time was a time of change. The old religion would not carry them into the next season. This was a time to **recognise their saviour** and to **accept the new life through Christ** that God was calling them into. The works of their own hands and the fruits of their own labours would not be acceptable. That old style of vineyard was going to be pulled down. **God was calling them into reconciliation with himself through Jesus.** This was a totally new style of vineyard where Jesus was the vine, and they were to be the branches. The life that ran through Jesus was to run through them. Jesus is the answer to Asaph’s psalm and to Isaiah’s prophetic words.

In Hebrews 12, Paul exhorts us to “throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles”, and we are to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfector of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”. For the joy set before him. That is us.

Paul tells us in Romans 5 that through God’s great love for us, Jesus’ came to restore us to a relationship of peace with God by giving up his life. And because of this, in Ephesians 4 Paul urges us to bear with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. John 14:27 records Jesus’ words: “I’m leaving you peace…I’m giving you my peace”.

God’s perspective is not ours. We cannot see as he does. Some issues or circumstances will not make sense to us. When this happens we can distance ourselves from God, and other people.

In the Greek text, Paul is instructing us to continually bear with one another in love. Bear or bearing here is on into infinity. We don’t bear with someone for a week, but on into the future. The division that comes because of Jesus is not just with others, but also within ourselves, when there is emotional or theological dissonance between what we understand and what Christ is asking of us. Sometimes the division can be from old understanding or old mindsets that we are comfortable with, and Christ wants to move us on to a place of discomfort, for new learning.

The Zone of Proximal development is Vygotski’s educational theory. It is the difference between what an individual can achieve alone, and what we can do with assistance or scaffolding.

We cannot of ourselves overcome division where there is enmity or apathy. Of ourselves we cannot continue to bear with one another on our journey of learning how to be, as we learn and stumble and fall forward.

However our zone of proximal development is scaffolded by the Holy Spirit. He is our skilled helper. Jesus in John 14 said: “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything.” He is the Spirit of Truth, who the world cannot receive (v26). He will enable us to do all we are called to.