

Righteousness and a Planting of the Lord

Lev 19:1-2,9-18; Ps 119:33-40, 1 Cor 3:10-17, Mat 5: 38-48

Story from streams in the Desert p 21

A story is told of a king who went to his garden, only to find everything withered and dying. He asked the oak tree that stood near the gate what the trouble was. The oak tree said it was tired of life and determined to die because it was not tall and beautiful like the pine tree. The pine tree was troubled because it could not bear grapes like the grapevine. The grapevine was determined to throw life away because it could not stand erect and produce fruit as large as peaches. The geranium was fretting because it was not tall and fragrant like the lilac.

And so it went throughout the garden. Yet coming to a violet, the king found its face as bright and happy as ever and said, "Well, violet, I'm glad to find one brave little flower in the midst of this discouragement. You don't seem to be the least disheartened". The violet responded, "No, I'm not. I know I'm small, yet I thought if you wanted an oak or a pine or a peach tree or even a lilac, you would have planted one. Since I knew you wanted a violet, I'm determined to be the best little violet I can be"

We all have a part to play in God's Kingdom work on earth and every part is important. This church has a part to play in this district that no other church can, it has a part to play in the Diocese that no other church can, and we in it from the longest serving member to the newest, from the oldest to the youngest, have a part to play – like the little violet in the story.

[This is true of the newest member admitted to the church today, Harry, and it is true for each of us. For the Baptism family and guests I pray that this message will speak to you as it includes advice on how to bring Harry up as well as a word of encouragement to the church here.]

Sometimes we can feel so discouraged or so weighed down by the circumstances around us or the pain of others we love, or our own pain, we can look only at the difficulties or the obstacles and they discourage and kill us from the inside, they can eat at us, they can block the light of Christ, then making it hard to see past them. We get caught up in looking at them, and looking at them for too long and forget that we belong to another Kingdom as well as being in the world. When such troubles and tough times take our whole focus we can forget that we have living within us the One who has overcome death, darkness, and this world. He is with us always, walking with us in this life, encouraging, coaching and leading us to be fully who we have been planted to be.

We are St Barnabas and we are to be encouragers like our parish namesake. One other namesake at Hall is St Michael and like that namesake we, like all angels, can be messengers of light and messengers of God.

We have been planted here for a reason - and like an oak, gum, violet or a bottlebrush – we, the parish of St Barnabas, are planted to bear fruit.

Every tree is known by its fruit.

Some fruit that Jesus showed, and so as His disciples we too would/should have is the fruit of obedience and the fruit of love.

We will see more of the fruit of love as we live out the Beatitudes.

We will be known by our love. Others who partake of this fruit will know the kind of fruit we have. And out of the fruit of love people will be drawn to the greatest love there is – Jesus.

God has already planted a tree in the parish of St Barnabas which is a tree of love, patience and longsuffering. Much deep root work has taken place in the lean years but now many will come hungry to eat the fruit we can offer and that will point to the Lord Jesus.

Much love happens in this place – many care for each other. Many pray and support those who experience hardship and trials such as currently Chris and her sister Barbara, such as Tina and the prayer support she has asked for her husband Mick, as he begins his treatment for cancer soon, many prayed for Clare as she underwent her treatment.

God has planted a tree of love in this parish and it is to bear the fruit of love. Trees produce only the fruit of either their root stock or the graft onto the root stock. We are all grafted onto the root stock of love as we are grafted into Jesus the true vine. So therefore the fruit we produce is love.

As with every fruit tree we need pruning and feeding to produce fruit.

Our love is not perfect and so God refines our love for God and each other.

Why does our love need refining?

Because of how holy, righteous and pure God is. Because His love is pure love and for us to be filled with His love our own impure love has to be refined.

All plants planted by God are to seek Him and His righteousness. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is a theme we are being reminded of again and again.

The readings today help us with this. So often we can say I don't know what it means to be righteous, or how to live in a righteous way.

Well Leviticus 19:2 sums it up. '*Be holy as I am holy*' says the Lord. Then what follows is a list of some of the ways to do it. It is a very practical list with a number of principles to be followed in all generations. Let's look at v 9 together. To live a holy righteous life be aware of the poor, in this case leave some extra in the paddocks for them after the main harvest sweep goes through. The Israelites already lived by giving the first 10% of the harvest to God and then this caring for the poor is to be part of a life style. Are we applying this teaching to our lives?

Vv 11 ff reminds us not to steal, lie, profane God's name. Are we applying these standards to our daily lives?

V 13 don't defraud or rob a neighbour, and don't hold back what is just wages. V 14 don't mistreat the disabled. V 15 don't; pervert justice. V 16 don't go about spreading slander or endanger a neighbour's life. V 17 don't hate in your heart and v 18 don't seek revenge or bear a grudge – **rather love!**

The Gospel says, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of our Father in heaven.*" Mt 5:44

Are we applying these ways of living to our lives?

This first reading offers practical suggestions of how to be holy and live righteously. The Gospel also gives us very practical ways of being and acting righteously.

Let's look at Psalm 119: 33-40. This section of the Psalm shows what is necessary for this to really make a difference.

This marvellous Psalm is talking about an **attitude of heart!**

It is a teachable heart – *Teach me O Lord to follow your decrees then I will keep them always.*

The words in the Gospel are also about an attitude of heart, reminding us not to count the cost of acting righteously, but rather willingly and generously going the extra mile in all sorts of ways.

The Psalm is also about asking for understanding so that we will obey with all our hearts.

It is about seeking God's direction, God's plan for our lives and our church life. The heart response then is delight – it is about delighting to do God's will. This is righteous living – and Jesus lived this way – delighting to do the Father's will.

It is about choices to turn away from worthless things and to live and be protected by God's Word.

V 40 says to God: *Preserve my life in Your righteousness.*

Be holy for God is holy. Seek righteousness for God is righteous and there is a preservation of life in that.

Do we want to preserve our lives for eternity?

Do we want our church to be preserved, to be here in 20 years time, in 50 years time, in 100 years time? Then the One and only who can preserve it is God. Our labours will be in vain unless the Lord continues to build it.

1 Corinthians 3:13 *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ”*

And the same Epistle reminds us that we are God's temple – which is sacred.

This increases the urgency to be holy as God is holy, every day, every minute, step-by-step, yes by yes.

We are a special planting of the Lord's and in this place one of the fruit God is giving and will give in greater measure is healing. Remembering that unless the Lord builds we labour in vain, we remember that God first builds a life in Him, a life in God, rooted and grounded in love. For each of us is God's building, God's planting and He builds and refines us in a life of love.

[Little Harry had just been added to God's Kingdom today and unless he is feed and watered as a new seed planted to grow into a beautiful and eternal member of God's family he could wither like a plant freshly planted and then left. Don't have him experience a drought. He needs to be fed on the Word of God, to have fellowship and relationship with Jesus, and others who will role model Jesus' life and standards to him. He needs to belong to a community of God, where he can be nurtured to blossom into what his rootstock is all about.]

And for this, our church the message today reminds us that we are a tree. A planting of the Lord. Like the little violet in the story I began with, let us play our part and be the best tree in the district. A tree of love, patience, and longsuffering – these, my friends, are fruit of the Spirit. Seeking God, and God's righteousness, seeking to receive God's love fully and loving God back will enable us to bear lasting fruit to God's glory.

Let us pray: