

GOOD FRIDAY SERMON – PASTOR GREG
15.04.2022

2022 GOOD FRIDAY Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is a Christian? What is it to be a Christian? I often answer this question by saying this: “A Christian is a person who knows and believes the Christmas story and the Easter story”. At the end of the Gospel according to Matthew we hear the familiar words: *Go and make disciples of all nations*. It is our responsibility and privilege to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In this day and age, it is increasingly difficult but we do not give up. A few years ago I returned to northern Cambodia to support the boarding house which had been set up there by Asia Focus. This time I was asked to teach EVANGELISM. I share some thoughts from that teaching.

1. From the known to the unknown. In the book of Acts both Peter and Paul make use of the OT to preach Jesus as the Messiah/the Christ- Acts 2:36: Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. It was a clear trajectory even though most Jewish people rejected it- at least they understood what Peter and Paul were saying. But who today outside of the church (and many inside the church) know of these stories? So we begin by asking what people think of God and go from there.

2. Creation. Acts 17:16-34. To the people of Athens who had built an altar to ‘an unknown god’ Paul said: “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth...”. We look at the world around us and ask the question- ‘where did it come from?’ David Attenborough has his answer as does so much of western science and society. Any who deny the BIG BANG THEORY are denounced as fools. But still creation can be a starting point for discussion.

3. Existential situation. “Who am I?” “Why am I here” “Why am I suffering?” “Is there life after death?” In this day and age, this is the strange paradox of western society- we have so much material wealth but we are in so much pain and so many are simply lost and without sustaining hope. But what is the message that we can give such people? That God is love and that He loves them and He is with them in their pain and suffering?

4. Works of service inspired by the love of Jesus Christ. World Vision, Red Cross, Lutheran World Service, Baptist Care, Aged Care, Education. We in the church can point to many wonderful, healing and loving things that we have done in the name of Jesus Christ- but is this the message?

And there is another way to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

5. Heaven or hell. We are very good and speaking of heaven but in recent times the Church has avoided speaking/preaching/teaching the reality of hell. But the New Testament clearly does not avoid hell.

Matthew 25:45, 46: *I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous eternal life.* In many ways the Church has tried to play down the reality of hell. How can an all loving God allow anyone suffer torment for ever? And so we seek to diminish the reality of hell.

Whatever it is – it is spending eternity outside of and away from God’s love. But why is there a hell at all? Because all human beings by nature refuse to love, trust and obey God.

Ephesians 2:1: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ Jesus even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins.

Romans 3:10. There is no one who is righteous, not even one....

John 3:5. Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth: no one can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again of water and the Spirit.”

John 8:34. Jesus replied: I tell you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

God is holy. God is righteous. And God is love. And this is why we are here today:

Isaiah 52: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering...He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by Him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

If there is no hell then why did the Eternal Son of God put aside his divinity, his power and authority, his glory and gave up his life? God wants no one in hell but He will not drag anyone against their will into heaven. And so there is a hell and there is a heaven. Life without God or life with God. That is why this day is Good Friday- The Righteous and Holy one died so that you and me and all those who simply trust in him will live forever in the light, the love and the peace of God. Because of Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Spirit- now and forever Amen.