

SERMON NOTES Sunday 19th March 2023

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **The Greatest Story Ever Told: Jesus the saviour is come!**

Passages: **Acts 13.16-31, 1 John 4.7-21**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

The (greatest) story so far...

A beautiful creation

Spoiled by human rebellion (Adam's and Eve's and yours and mine)

God chooses not to abandon his creation but to restore it.

As Paul explains to the people of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13.16-31), the long term restoration project has God working with and through faithful but fallen people across the generations: Abraham, Moses, Joseph and David.

There were many further bumps in the road as the Israelites again and again prove faithless and endure invasion and exile. God's prophets again and again call them back to faith in the one true God and look forward to a time God would act decisively through his chosen servant, his Son. And then, at long last, as Paul explains in Acts 13.23, God brought the saviour Jesus

The climax of the story

There is a sense in which we have reached the climax of the greatest story ever told. Jesus has come! In another sense, we will understand the full weight of the climax as we journey together with Jesus through Holy Week to his death and resurrection on Easter Day. In yet another sense, we are ourselves actors in the final scene of the drama, as members of Jesus' team. As part of His body we work and pray to hasten the time when the final curtain will fall on the drama of creation. Then, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil 2.10-11).

Why do I believe that this is the greatest story ever told?

We live in a pluralist, postmodern culture, where people do not feel that there is any such thing as objective truth. You choose what you think and believe. So, I am going to share with you what I think and believe. It begins with Acts 13.29-31. It seems to me that the resurrection of Jesus is where great story meets hard fact.

If there had been no resurrection, there would have been no coming of the Holy Spirit, Paul would never have written his letters, the Gospel writers just wouldn't have bothered either.

I want it to be true because it is so emotionally resonant with me as a story in its own terms. As I read the accounts, as intelligently as I am able, I am persuaded that it really did happen. If it did, then it's really important. Jesus is really important. It means something not just to me but to everyone.

The meaning of the greatest story

What it means is twofold:

1. Jesus was so special that what he said and did need paying attention to (more of this next week)
2. What happened to Jesus tells us important truths about the way the world is:
 - a. Love is real. It is stronger than hate, good is stronger than evil
 - b. God would (and did) stop at nothing to save his wayward world (1 John 4.9)
 - c. We are invited to share in God's community of love (1 John 4.12)
 - d. Our own impulse to love and to value love is God given (1 John 4.16)
 - e. Even in the worst of times, we can know that God is for us (1 John 4.18)
 - f. If we are Jesus' people (and we are), love is not an optional extra. It's at the heart of who we are (1 John 4.7-8, 20-21).

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

1. *If you had to summarise your Christian faith in less than 5 words, which words would you choose?*
2. *Read 1 John 4.20. Are there people you find it really difficult to love? How do you feel about this bible verse?*
3. *What difference does it make to your life that God loves you?*
4. *What difference does it make to other people that God loves you?*
5. *Follow this link to a very provocative but powerful poem by the WW1 poet Woodbine Willy (Revd G A Studdert Kennedy). Read the poem and discuss its impact on you.*
https://webfiles.acu.edu/departments/Library/HR/restmov_nov11/www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/dasc/TUB.HTM#Page5
6. *Thinking about our sermon series on 'The greatest story ever told' (see the sermon notes for a summary), what have you learned about God through it? What have you learned about yourself as a follower of Jesus?*