

October 04th 19th after Pentecost (St. Francis – transferred)

10 commandments

Psalm 19 – praising how good God's commandments are.

Philippians and Matthew – talking about the hollow promises of worldly power.

Be aware, if you haven't been previously, that these texts have been used to promote anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic sentiments. What we need to understand is that what Paul is saying and what Jesus is saying is confronting structures and positions of power and control and oppression. So when we are talking about that kind of confrontation, which has a lot to say about all times and places of history, including our own. And so with that in mind, those criticisms are going to be construed by people, at least some people, as being political, and that is inescapable, because Jesus' teachings and the parable he tells, as well as Paul's letter to the church in Philippi are confronting and calling out systems and positions of power and control of and over people – and not only that but a stark warning to everyone, everywhere, in all times, that we can all fall under the spell of being in those positions of power and control, and in so doing, then we become those that Jesus was talking about who rejected the landowner's son, we become those who fall on the cornerstone and are broken to pieces or those who are crushed by it. This applies to those who were in leadership and had control in Jesus day, and in Paul's, and before, and after. It has applied all through time, and even in our own modern era whether it is Canada, the US, the UK, South Africa, Sri Lanka or Sudan. It applies whether it is Israel, Gaza, Russia, Ukraine, Iran, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and really anywhere on any continent. When structures and leaders of all kinds and types cease to follow the laws and statutes that hold us together, and give us the framework to live peaceably and well together, inevitably at best there is hurt, and heartache and harm, and at worst, there is conflict, division, violence, strife and war – and always, the ones who suffer most, are the innocent, and they suffer because of the systems that fail them, and at the hands of and because of the decisions and actions of those who are in positions of power and control. Sadly, this is human history. This past week we marked the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation across Canada – together we remembered a nation's shame in how it has treated the first peoples of this land. We remember how our church was complicit in those terrible crimes, and the far reaching effects those terrible actions have had on successive generations. As people in this country, and as members of our church, we stand accountable and taking responsibility for the sins of previous generations, working to reconcile and heal and walk a path forward journeying together, building relationship and rebuilding broken relationship. No small task.

Now, we look at the forgiveness and the grace, and the redemption -

The Psalm talks about how good it is to follow God's law, that God's statutes revive the soul and rejoice the heart, more to be desired than gold, and far sweeter than honey. The things that give us the framework to build community, and a shared life of prosperity, with compassion, care, love, support, humility, respect, grace and mercy. These are what we pray guide us in our daily lives - in our interactions and dealings; these are what we pray and hope guide our leaders in their work, remembering that the last shall be first, and the first shall be last - out of grace, and humility, and generosity, and abundance. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven has come near, and is in fact in our very midst. When two or three gather together in God's name, the kingdom is there. When we find the kingdom come near us, then we find God's forgiveness, and a path forward, a path that leads us to life –

and this is partly what I think Paul was talking about, forgetting what lies behind – the rationalizations and excuses given, the fears, complicity and collusion with oppressive powers and principalities, guilt, and shame – the things that bind us and hold us back and make us stuck – forsaking those things, but remembering the history so as not to repeat it, holding on to the truths told, and straining forward to what lies ahead – life, restored relationship with God, with family, friends, neighbours and strangers alike. A path forged in grace, love and mercy that sees us walking together in God's Peace. This is the dream, this is the prophecy, this is what we keep working to build every time we meet as church, as God's people, as the Body of Christ. Amen.