

livingtheword

www.livingtheword.org.nz

Hearing and Living the Sunday Readings

Reading 1 Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Some who had come down from Judea were instructing the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved." Because there arose no little dissension and debate by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.

The apostles and elders, in agreement with the whole church, decided to choose representatives and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers. This is the letter delivered by them:

"The apostles and the elders, your brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia of Gentile origin: greetings.

Since we have heard that some of our number who went out without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind, we have with one accord decided to choose representatives and to send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So we are sending Judas and Silas who will also convey this same message by word of mouth: 'It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage.

If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right. Farewell."

Reflection Questions

- Reading the passages slowly and reflectively, what word, phrase or idea strikes you in the readings? (circle or underline them)
- What do you think God is trying to say to you personally through these words?
- Circumcision was physical and symbolic - an outward sign of an inner consecration and being a nation 'set-apart'. It was a physical part of oneself offered to God like a sacrifice. Jewish Christians wanted gentile Christians to follow their Mosaic practice (given by Moses) and be circumcised. This question caused the first Council of Jerusalem meeting. How do we know what is important to keep practicing? Are external markings important? Do you show / wear of sign of belonging to God? Why?
- Jewish / Gentile conflict happened in the very early days of the Christian community. Reducing numbers of Jewish Christians were faced with increasing numbers of Gentile Christians. The loss of culture and influence caused tension. How was the tension resolved? What are the lessons for us today?
- Pagan temples often used animals for sacrifices. This meat was cut up and sometimes sold in the 'market'. What are more modern idols and institutions that could affect true worship of God today?

Reading 2 Rev 21:10-14, 22-23

The angel took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal. It had a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed and on which names were inscribed, the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites.

There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west. The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb. The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb.

Gospel Jn 14:23-29

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.

“I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you.’

If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.”

- The Book of Revelation is written during a time of great persecution. A vision is painted of the future being secure in the ultimate victory of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. We all need a vision and story to lead and call us forward in our current pain and struggle. It is the essence of hope. In your difficult times, what keeps you going? What is the story and vision of the future that gives you hope?
- The gates of God’s City have three gates open in all directions. If you were to picture your church community, how could it be seen to have its doors ‘open’ and welcoming to all? What is something you would be willing to try to make your parish more ‘welcoming’?
- Jesus teaches his disciples there is a link between loving Him and keeping his Word. Reflect on an experience of listening to His Word. What is the difference between listening and keeping? Have you had an experience of feeling ‘at home’ with the Word? What is it like?
- In John the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate (a translation of the Greek Paraclete - literally the one who stands by the side of a defendant in the courtroom). It is also translated as counsellor, comforter, encourager. What image do you have for the Holy Spirit in your life?
- Peace is the ‘trademark’ and presence of the Holy Spirit in the tradition of Christian spirituality. ‘Not as the world gives do I give it to you’. What sort of ‘peace’ does the world seek to give? Where is peace ‘found’?
- What is one action that you will do to ‘livetheword’ this week?