

Sunday 18th June – People of God#3 'Redeemed' (Isaiah 53:4-6, Matthew 26:20-30)

How do you feel about being indebted to others? Some of you may be thinking I wouldn't know I've never been indebted to anyone. I pay my way, I don't owe anyone a coffee, a reciprocal play date. I've shared as many books, seeds, jigsaw puzzles, gifts with those around me, as they have with me. So basically I am not indebted.

Others of you might be twinging with a bit of guilt remembering the things you have borrowed and not returned, the outstanding meals, drinks rounds, coffees, play-dates. (If I were giving this talk face to face I would probably have a small table next to me with items to be returned that I am indebted to others for lending me - they include, angel wings, dog training manuals, cake tins. But my job today is not to convict you of guilt, but to get us thinking about a debt that we can't clear ourselves.

The younger generation are probably thinking, well that sounds just like my student debt - how am I ever going to clear that...but I am talking about something even bigger than a student debt - yes such a thing does exist...

Today I am talking about the debt we owe Jesus. The debt that he paid on our behalf to redeem us. Redemption is not a word that is often used today. When I thought about it, the only common usage I could think of was about coupons/vouchers being redeemed, traded in for a discount. Maybe that's a sign of our times when many of us are on the look out for a deal. But where else does the word redemption get used? Certainly in terms of history, slaves were redeemed, their worth was paid off and they were freed. This kind of redemption could never be achieved by the individual themselves, it was done by a third party.

In Exodus, in the Old Testament we see God's people being freed from physical slavery in Egypt. But that didn't solve all their problems. They didn't always get things right, they grumbled, they didn't trust, they made bad choices - they didn't live as God intended them to live which blocked his blessings. Another way of putting it quite bluntly is that they sinned, they like sheep (as the Isaiah passage puts it) went their own way, which literally left them wandering in a desert for 40 years!

You see God's people needed another type of freeing, not just from physical slavery, they needed freeing from their sins, they needed redeeming. But why is sin such a big deal? Why does our Isaiah reading tell us "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities (or sin), the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."?

We worship a God of justice. Sin or wrongdoing cannot just run without consequence. Being image bearers of God we are no different, even from infancy, you hear children whine ' It's not fair' - where does that come from, it seems innate. Justice matters to God, as it does to us, and so sin and wrongdoing cannot go unpunished, it must be dealt with.

If you imagine a film reel of your life over the past week, running through your mind: the choices, the thoughts, the actions, the inactions, I don't think a single one of us would feel altogether proud. All of us sin, we fall short of the standards God asks of us, we miss the mark.

The Old Testament of the bible is full of instructions as to what God's people should do to make amends for their sins. There was an elaborate system of animal sacrifices. But ultimately God's people kept getting it wrong, they kept failing to meet His perfect standards. It reminds me of one of those birthday candles that keeps relighting itself, however many times you blow it out - God calls his people to live in the light without sin, but they choose to walk in darkness and the light gets snuffed out. God forgives and calls his people to live in the light but they prefer the darkness, making poor choices and so the pattern continued. I have to say if that sacrificial system were still in play I think bulls, goats, sheep & doves would all be on the endangered list!

In our Matthew reading Jesus is commemorating the Passover, which was the first covenant God made with his chosen people 1200 years previously. Jesus is in Jerusalem sharing this commemorative meal with his friends, during which he went on to use the bread and wine as visual aids to explain the meaning of his coming death. With the bread, he says 'Take and eat; this is my body.' and with the wine he says 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" The bread and wine make clear what would happen, his body would be broken and his blood would be shed, but telling his disciples to eat and drink it indicated that in some sense they were involved in his death and therefore were also able to experience the benefits of forgiveness achieved through it. The liability, the penalty of all sin, of all people of all time fell on another, on Jesus, who willingly accepted it, nailing it to the cross. Notice that Jesus knew Judas was going to betray him, but he fully accepted God's plan and allowed the betrayal to happen.

It's the most wonderful, undeserved exchange of roles: Jesus is punished for our sin verse 5 and we are healed - cause and effect. Jesus is the one perfect substitute, leaving nothing outstanding, paying the price to redeem us, setting us free from the power and judgement of sin. In Isaiah it makes it says We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. So that's good news for all people, of all time.

What can we do in response to this? **Gratitude** : I think we can cry Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus for your sacrifice, for your love.

Remember: Some of us might just need to remember that we are redeemed. It's not about what we can do, it's what Jesus has already done - we are a redeemed people. It's all His work not ours.

Accept: Some of us may need to accept that we are sinners and are in need of forgiveness and redemption. Today we may want to accept that "By Jesus's wounds - we are healed"

Confess : Maybe there is some sin in our lives that we want to be free of, that we know is displeasing to God. Let's confess that to God and ask for his strength.

Everyone : Jesus death on the cross dealt with the sin of the whole world. We are redeemed. This is good news for everyone, maybe this is a message we need to share. You may have noticed that the first letters of those responses Gratitude, remember, accept, confess, everyone spells the word GRACE - we are redeemed by God's grace. It's all about Him. Let's keep it that way! Amen