

5/08/2007

Rev Robert Denham

We live in a pleasure world. Canned laughter on sitcoms tries to find the right spot. Comedians find it hard to make people laugh. Yet the world loves to laugh. Amusement and entertainment are highly sought after. Fortunes are sold each day to bring highs and pleasures to people. We live in a pleasure world.

We have idolised Pinocchio's donkey-making pleasure island, yet most people slave in salt mines, yearning for Pleasure Island. We are sold on its glamour, freedom, & pleasures, but the donkeys are not just those who taste its pleasure, but the millions more who dream of it and make it their life's goal.

In such a world, the blessed are thought to be those who experience pleasure. The pitied are those who never will know its titillating thrills. The fools are those who've been there, but are now paying for it.

But in God's world, the blessed are not those who seek pleasure, but those who mourn. People in our world cannot live with mourning. Grieving, crying and yearning for something that is gone makes you a wet blanket. We are told "Don't mourn! Kick up our heels! Leave the past behind! Hakuna matata, be carefree and not so down!"

But Jesus said in Matthew 5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

He may mean mourning over death, divorce, separation or whatever, but I believe he is also referring to spiritual mourning.

As individuals, we are mourners if we feel grief because of our sin. What is that grief? It is not feeling sorry that you have been caught. It is not worrying in case God might punish you. But it is a deep seated distress that you have sinned, defying God, not obeying or loving Him, and not loving our neighbour as ourselves.

It is easy to light-heartedly dismiss sin. As if to say, "God forgives, so do something wrong, say sorry and get let off."

True repentance, truly turning away from sin involves grieving over the fact that you sin against God. The mere thought of it should cut our hearts in distress.

Do you truly grieve about your wrong, and the good you fail to do? Being poor in spirit naturally leads to this. For when we recognise that we are not good enough, and that we are morally and spiritually bankrupt before God, it should lead to a grieving, and not just mourning personal sin....

At the community level, do you grieve the sin of the world; injustice from avid greed; cruelty excused as following rules; selfishness denying food, clothing, shelter and justice to millions; and the overwhelming cheapness of life seen in bombs ripping bodies, foetuses flushed out; teenage suicide; and prostitution?

Do you mourn, like Jesus mourned for Jerusalem? Do you look at our world, nation, state, city, and community crying for God to forgive & to change people by his Spirit? Do you grieve for all who reject God? Or neglect Him? Or have never heard?

And do you mourn for our created world that is being ravaged? Does pollution ever cause you to mourn? Does destruction of the intricate wonders of creation make you cry? Are you groaning as we wait for Jesus' return, when the new heavens and new earth come to restore what we have destroyed, just as the lowering of the Genesis flood brought a new fresh world to Noah & his family?

It can be easy to fake this type of mourning. The Victorian era of Christianity highlighted the mourning side of Christianity. Next time you go into St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney, have a look at the Pentecost windows above the communion table. Before the cathedral was turned around, there used to be a row of pews at their height. One night I sat up there and was a bit bored (in a sermon? Me?) and I turned to look at the windows. For such a wonderful day as Pentecost with tongues of fire coming down on their heads, filling them with joy, the disciples in that window are the saddest, dowdiest bunch of people I have seen.

But that dowdy mournful Christianity was often a mask, constricting Christians, so much so that our world has reacted by going to the other extreme, and now to be happy is to be blessed.

So Christians have followed suit. It is no longer popular to teach that the mourners are blessed. Now we are to be joyful. And just as fake mourning became popular, now a shallow joyfulness is seen as the mark of much Christianity.

The depth we require is to have a true mourning, a true grief for evil which is found inside us, in others, and the effects are seen throughout creation.

But the mourners are blessed, because they will be comforted. This is the true joy which God gives, because there is hope. There is forgiveness. There is life. There is reconciliation. There is Jesus. He has done it all for us by dying on the cross.

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He gives us His joy through the Holy Spirit whom
He lavishly pours on us.

There is a place for mourning.

We are to mourn, & God turns our mourning into
joy and comfort. Blessed are the mourners, for they
will be comforted.

We are not to be constant wet blankets, long faced
and dreary, wallowing in pits of self-pity. But
constantly our poverty of Spirit will force us to
mourn. Yet also constantly, God will comfort us,
and give us the joy which surpasses and overrides
our sorrow.

In Romans 7 Paul speaks of this constant feature of
Christian living, the mourning and the joy. He says
*Oh wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me
from this body of death? ... Thanks be to God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

He knew. He grieved and rejoiced together. He had
the depth of Christian understanding that all who
are truly blessed will experience.

Let us all grieve and mourn because of sin and its
effects. But also rejoice in the Lord always because
we shall be comforted.