

Sunday 18th June 2017 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		11th Sunday – Pentecost 2 - Year A Fathers’ Day – Youth Sunday CORPUS CHRISTI SUNDAY Bernard Mizeki, Martyr, 1896
Gen 18:1-15	Ps 116:1-2, 11-18	Romans 5:1-8
		Matthew 9:35 – 10:8
HELD IN LOVE		

“But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8)

Fathers’ Day, Youth Sunday, Bernard Mizeki, Corpus Christi Sunday, recent fires...

I begin by acknowledging a number of key events, commemorations, tragedies, celebrations:

We continue to hold, in our prayers and love, family, friends, communities, in Cape Town, Kynsna, Plett, Port Elizabeth, as they recover from the storms, floods and fires of a week ago; further afield, the people of Grenfell Tower, London, UK. Many of us have family or friendship links in communities here and elsewhere; Sally Terry’s daughter is a social worker in the Grenfell Tower area and is directly involved in caring for that community. Hearing from people we know, it has been utterly devastating and deeply traumatising.

Today is Fathers’ Day. We congratulate and give honour to all fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers, and all god-fathers. We also acknowledge all who give fatherly care and attention to young people around them.

Today, being the Sunday closest to Youth Day, June 16th, is observed as Youth Sunday.

Today - June 18th – is also the commemoration of Bernard Mizeki, a convert to Christianity, who ministered in what is now Zimbabwe

and was murdered in 1896. We remember him as one of our Christian martyrs, who gave his life for Christ and for the gospel.

Romans 5:1-8

Our readings: God visits Abraham (Genesis 18); Jesus is filled with compassion and sends the disciples out to heal and set free (Matt 9-10); we are held in love (Romans 5).

We are introduced to some key themes in Paul's letter. Each phrase, each sentence, each verse, is worthy of attention, time, reflection, unpacking. It is a densely written letter, often more of a lecture than a letter as we would understand it: a series of closely argued themes, outlining the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ as St Paul understood it and developed it. It could be said that Jesus Christ laid the foundations of our faith through his fundamental and central act of death and resurrection – and St Paul developed it, established its doctrine, belief, and formed and shaped the church.

The earlier chapters of Romans: the reality of human sin... all have sinned, have fallen short of the glory of God... our need for salvation, for a saviour... salvation by faith in Jesus

“...Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Rom 4:24-25).

5:1 “Therefore, now that we have been justified through faith, we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

“We have been saved; we are being saved; we will be saved.”

Paul uses three terms to describe the process:

Justification – we have been saved;

Sanctification – we are being saved;

Glorification – we will be saved.

One of the key meanings of the death of Jesus: that we are justified, made righteous, by his death on the cross. It is through faith in what 2

He has done, not in what we are able to achieve. We all fall short; we all fail. We put our faith and trust in what God has done for us in Christ.

5:3 “... we even exult [boast] in our present sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

It seems very strange to boast in our present sufferings – usually we do all we can to avoid suffering, to escape it; we endure it; we look back on it with amazement that we survived! Yet we also ask - how has suffering shaped us? Strengthened us? Broken us? Like a weightlifter or an athlete, who pushes against the odds to train, it is hardship that makes us what we are: hard work, opposition, obstacles. We are refined by suffering, by fire. And by God’s grace we come out stronger on the other side.

5:4 “Such hope is no fantasy; through the Holy Spirit he has given us, God’s love has flooded our hearts.”

God’s love is poured like water onto dry ground (Is 44:3) through the Spirit given to us.

The experience of that love... of the Spirit...of the death of Christ (5:5, 8) makes believers confident that they are now reconciled with God.

5:8 “But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

We are held in love. While we were in despair, facing the worst, Christ died for us...

We are held in the love of God

We are held in the love of God. It is this love that we carry with us...

... as fathers, as parents. God holds and carries you in love.

Father's Day is a time to celebrate our own fathers, our parents. And for fathers to recognise the immensely significant role that we have – or can have - in the lives of our children and our families; we acknowledge the leadership role of men in our communities; we salute our senior citizens, men and women, with their years of wisdom and experience; we acknowledge the strength and courage and endurance of men, like bull elephants, great trees in a forest, who stand firm and upright in the midst of storms. On a personal note, it is one of the greatest privileges that I have, to be a father to our two darling daughters. A gift that I treasure beyond words.

We thank God for our families. It is a sad reality of our society that many children grow up with absent fathers; many families have no men present; many children do not know what it is like to have the love and guidance and leadership and example of their father. Single parents, whether male or female, do their best under difficult circumstances, and succeed in raising wonderful children and young people. And where would we be without our grandparents, who often hold families together?

We are held in the love of God. It is this love that we carry with us...

... as young people. God holds you in love. God loves you!

On Youth Sunday, we acknowledge with great pride the achievements of our young people; the hopes and dreams that all youngsters have; the responsibility that adults have to nurture and encourage and protect children and youngsters in their care; we recognise the potential that each child, each young person, has.

Youth challenges are immense: finding meaning, purpose, direction for one's life; young people can be overwhelmed with difficulties, stress, obstacles...

June 16th, 1976, was the start of what became known as the Soweto uprisings. Led very largely by high school pupils, they had a profound impact on the life of our country. Many died, gave their lives, sacrificed. Many of us remember those days. What is the future for our children? Our teenagers and young adults?

We are a country with a very high percentage of our population under 25 years old. We invest a huge amount of our resources into the care and education of our youngsters – rightly so. Our young people are the future – and at the same time need nurturing and mentoring by wise, mature adults. Parents, teachers, others in the extended family and community, all have a vital role to play.

God holds you in love. God loves you!

We are held in the love of God. It is this love that we carry with us...

... in our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ: the gospel that St Bernard Mizeki preached, and the faith for which he died. In the midst of the political and social turmoil that we experience... We are held in the love of God.

CONCLUSION

God holds us in love.

Jesus gave his life for us; he gave us the new commandment to love one another; he gave us his body and blood which we receive in the sacrament of the Eucharist: an everlasting fresh encounter with the life and love of Christ.

“Bread of heaven on thee we feed, for thy flesh is meat indeed;
Ever may our souls be fed with this true and living bread, Day by day with strength supplied through the life of him who died.”

“Vine of heaven, thy Blood supplies this blest cup of sacrifice; It is thy wounds our healing give; to thy cross we look and live; thou our life! O let us be rooted, grafted, built on thee.”¹

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June 2017

¹ *English Hymnal* 304