**Sermon Trinity 7 on Sunday 18th July 2021**

By Rev’d Graham Phillips

2 Samuel 7.1-14a

Mark 6.30-34,53-56

I have recently had the pleasure of taking two weddings. It is a wonderful moment when a couple makes a lifelong commitment to each other. It brings certainty to their relationship. Prior to the wedding, as in all close relationships they may have lots of questions to work through. Questions like what if I do not get on with the in-laws, what if we do not have the same hopes in life, what if we have very different views on sex, on the use of money, on careers, on holidays, what if my partner wants 7 children and I do not want any? Before the marriage differing answers to these questions could have scuppered the relationship, sunk it before it had a chance to mature and grow.

But after the marriage there is no longer the concern, the worry of “if”. “If” has been replaced by “always”. Always there for each other, to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till God brings it to an end. These vows of commitments have been made and now the boat will ride on the waters of married life. The waters will not always be smooth for the questions still remain and must be worked through but the uncertainty of “if” has been replaced with the solidity, the certainty of “always”. Always there. This state of permanence is the rock on which marriage is built, on which the couple and ensuing family thrive and grow.

We all need stability, we all need certainty in our relationships.

God had made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would live in the land of Israel. God also had made a covenant with Moses in which the Israelite nation were to be his chosen, preferred nation. An agreement between them that separated them from the rest of humanity and came with promises and agreements of action on both sides. Primarily these were the Ten Commandments, a way of living which God called the Israelite nation to aspire to. These were supplemented with other rules and regulations - over 600 of them all together - you can read them in the book of Deuteronomy. In the final chapters, (chapter 28), Moses draws them all together with a list of blessings following obedience and curses following disobedience. Moses said: “If you fully obey the Lord your God and follow all his commands that I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on the Earth…However if you do not obey …curses will come upon you and overtake you.” They make sober reading.

King Saul fell foul of these. He was removed from Kingship because of his failure to be faithful to God. But now God makes a new covenant with King David, and it all starts with David wanting to build a house for The Ark of the Covenant, that special box that Moses had constructed under God’s guidance to house the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments had been written. A hugely symbolic box signifying the presence of God, of Yahweh with his chosen people. David wants to house it in a grand temple and in 1 Chronicles we can read that God, speaking through the prophet Nathan explains that David is not the one to build this temple as he has killed many. His son, Solomon will have that responsibility, that honour.

Instead God makes a promise to David that his house, his descendants - the Hebrew has both meanings - will always be sitting on the throne - that God will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. This is a promise to David - always, not dependant on “I will only do this if your descendants behave themselves.” This is a shift in the agreement, the covenant - “I will do this always - forever.” Never again will God remove someone from the Kingship. The “if” you obey me and the subsequent consequences have been replaced by “always”.

And the Christian word for God’s always is Jesus. Jesus will always be there for us, he never leaves us or forsakes us, even though we sin again and again he will always forgive us and accept us into the Father’s presence. He will always love us, always intercede for us, he will always be on our side.

Do you feel that to be true? Or do you have doubts? Maybe you think you are never good enough for Jesus, that if you fail to do something, whatever that might be, you will fall out of favour? Maybe you think God is a harsh, demanding God with standards you can never reach, that you will always disappoint him?

And what about heaven? Do you think you must earn your place in heaven? That only good people go to heaven? THIS IS WRONG - forgiven people go to heaven and forgiveness is offered to us all. God loves us all and wants all to be saved, none to be lost, that is the gift of God, the grace of God, the love of God at work.

So if you have doubts - take them to God, name them and release them to Jesus. If your faith is built on “ifs” - stop being like an engaged couple, for you have been redeemed, bought at a cost. Instead be the bride of Christ, living in the certainty of “always”, remembering that Jesus said, “I am with you always to the end of the age”