**SERMON Our Story to Tell 7th November 2021**

Deut 4:1-9, 32-40

What stories do you tell?

The stories we tell,

the facts we concentrate on,

the way we tell it,

the details we include - or leave out – are significant

Each reveals something about who we are,

what is important to us

and what we believe

Are we an optimist or pessimist?

Do we want to look good in the eyes of the listener

or do we need comfort, sympathy, care?

Are we hopeful or fearful, confident or insecure?

And what do the stories we tell say about Jesus, our faith, our experience of God?

What stories do you tell?

Because the stories we tell, the stories we live by,

are more important, have more significance, than you may have ever realised.

In fact our stories, the way we think and talk about our lives,

what we have done, what has happened to us,

not only reveal what is important, what we believe, our values…

They also help shape our future, prepare us for what is ahead,

equip us for moving forward.

So what stories do you tell?

If we were to believe the stories we see on facebook – everyone’s lives are perfect – well at least certainly happier, more interesting and more enjoyable than mine!

If we were to believe the stories we hear on the news, read in the paper – then there is no hope, evil is everywhere, no one can be trusted and the world is doomed.

But what about the stories we find in God’s Word? The story we look at today? What about the story Moses tells?

The story of God’s people.

The story of their rescue, their rebellion and their impending restoration?

What do the stories in Deuteronomy tell us about what is important,

what God is up to

and what that means for their future?

Deuteronomy means second law.

It is another repeat of many of the same things that we have heard in the previous 4 books of the Bible, the first 4 books.

But this time – rather than a record, a selection of stories the editor has collected…

This time we have Moses giving a number of sermons.

The people of God are on the edge of the promised land

The first generation have all died out,

Moses is about to die,

the people are ready to cross the Jordon

and receive the reward God has promised.

At last, after more than 400 years, the covenant God made with Abraham…

their founding father – is about to be fulfilled.

In some ways it feels a bit like this for me – today.

As we have inducted Ross into this role as GrangeLife Lead.

For me this is a fulfilment of something God has put on the heart of this church

- even before I came.

We are a Church – where deep in our DNA – we know…

we are here, in this place, in this location - to be a blessing to this community.

When this building in which we now worship was being considered…

God made it clear – Grange Baptist is called to be here…

in this location for the people of this neighbourhood.

Just before I began, the Church had 2 pastors.

Both committed to engaging with the community,

one whose role was changed,

his title as I understand it became “Community pastor”

The other – well he didn’t need a title he was always out there,

alongside the broken, the marginalised, the isolated…

And 5 or 6 years ago, wanting to be strategic, effective, wise in our approach.

We engaged Baptist Care to journey with us.

And for 12 months or so, a dedicated team with the support of Joanna Hubbard,

asked the neighbourhood – what is happening?

Where is God at work,

What are people passionate about,

Where are the needs,

How is God wanting us to be involved in this community?

And from that Jo was appointed,

our community ministries like the Café were strengthened

and SHARE commenced.

But that was just the beginning. We knew there was so much more to be done.

And so with some significant support from Neels Castle, a way forward emerged.

About 2 years ago a project team was appointed and Grange Life was born.

What we envisaged was a community ministry of Grange Baptist Church which existed to support those in the community who are experiencing isolation because of mental health issues, disability, aging or challenging behaviours.

Since that time – we have had a number of pilot projects,

parenting courses,

and new ministries like Creative Minds and Fit for Summer commence.

But what we were praying for was someone to head it up.

Someone who understood our vision,

shared our passion,

had the right gifts and felt God’s call.

Today, in Ross we believe we have our man!

And in this way I feel a little like Moses.

Not that I am about to leave you.

But God has been good.

He has brought us through fire and cloud to the beginning of our future.

We are on the edge looking into the promised land.

And like Moses, we now have our Joshua to lead this ministry into this land….

BUT…

We know it will not be that simple.

As Moses reminded his people - their history informs their future…

it will not all be smooth sailing.

There are rivers to cross,

enemies to fight

and squabbles, misunderstandings and disagreements to sort…

But – like the Israelites – just as God has been faithful in the past,

Just as he has fulfilled his promises thus far and been with them through it all…

– so we can be confident that God who has been faithful…

will continue to be present and at work as we go forward with Him

But also, like the Israelites…

Just as they have been given opportunity to learn, to grow to be obedient…

so now the same choices awaits each of us.

Not just in terms of GrangeLife

But in our relationships, in our homes, in our workplaces

God is putting before us a choice – what will you choose!?

So, in the few minutes remaining…

What do we learn from these sermons, the stories Moses now tells.

What do we learn about who God is, what God is doing and what God wants?

What do we learn about what God wants of us? PAUSE

The book of Deuteronomy comes to us as a number of sermons.

Speeches to remind and encourage

Stories that speak of God’s faithfulness.

How he has rescued his people,

established a covenant with them,

given them His law to obey

and provided for them all they needed.

But there are also stories of their fickleness,

their disobedience

and inability to do what was required and follow through on what they promised.

Stories that remind them of what happens when they fail

and the judgement that will come as a result.

Moses is telling these stories to make it clear: *“You have a choice—do you want the LORD to bless you, or do you want him to put a curse on you? Today I am giving you his laws, and if you obey him, he will bless you. But if you disobey him and worship those gods that have never done anything for you, the LORD will put a curse on you.” (Deu 11:26-28)* PAUSE

Hear again we hear Gods call to listen and obey.

When you do… when there is obedience – it brings blessing and life,

But when we don’t when we don’t do what God has said…

When we refuse to listen, when we are disobedient, of fail to trust Him…

curses and death is what will follow.

As night follow day – this is how it works.

Which is a problem! A very big problem!

It is a problem for Moses,

it is a problem for the Israelites

and it is a problem for us

Because we know – it doesn’t matter how much we want to, or how hard we try…

we wont!

History tells us, if we are honest we know our own heart – we just can’t

*“The good I want to do – I don’t. The evil I don’t want to do – I do! “*

Even Paul understood this is what happens.

So we are doomed! If this is how it works what hope can there be for us!? PAUSE

It is this reality which is at the heart of the Christian good news!

God wants to bless us.

But rebellion, disobedience sin – deserves to be judged.

So what to do?!

The prophet Jeremiah knowing this reality - hinted at the way forward.

At what God would do.

Listen to what He says: *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer 31:31-33)*

And this he achieved in Jesus.

Jesus who came to fulfil the law

Jesus who bore the curses we deserved

Jesus who achieved for us perfect righteousness.

This is not something we have to earn

It’s is not given to those who are good enough

Who keep enough of the commandments and laws to keep God off their back

Who do enough to deserve a blessing rather than a curse…

This is given as a free gift to all who know they need it. To all who want it.

Offered without obligation or expectation – to you.

Today, God says: *“You have a choice—do you want the LORD to bless you, or do you want him to put a curse on you?*

But instead of how it use to be,

God now says: the choice is now longer about the requirement to obey.

It is simply to say yes. Yes to his offer of life.

Yes to his forgiveness.

Yes to his invitation to join His family.

Will you say Yes to him today?

And Imagine if you did – imagine what stories you would then be able to tell.

<http://www.crivoice.org/books/deuteronomy.html>

<https://bible.org/article/introduction-deuteronomy>

1-4 Review

5-26 requirements

27-29 Results

30-34 Reward

1. Recap of Israel’s journey from Egypt (Dt 1–3)
2. Recap of Israel’s relationship with God (Dt 4–10)
3. How to love God and keep His commandments (Dt 11–26)
4. Blessings, curses, and restoration (Dt 27–30)
5. The death of Moses (Dt 31–34)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfHlvrAKMoU>

A number of sermons – done by retelling the story… for a purpose

Telling fo the story

Deuteronomy focuses on loving God and keeping His commandments

It had been a wonderful 10 days.

Arriving in Tasmanian with 2 of my girls, a grandchild and a son in law with whom I was to enjoy a number of games of golf had been a dream come true.

Sure I was missing my wife in particular, the rest of my family, and my Church… but what a gift, what a privilage – 10 days holidaying doing what I loved, with little or no responsibility for anyone else… and then 2 weeks to myself. To read, reflect, pray, walk, ponder, refresh…

Bliss

And yet….

And yet I am accutely aware that I am an extrovert. Being with people energises me. Being alone deplets me. I can only go for so long without others with whom I can interact!

And now this realisation, the reality of what awaited me began to become real!

It’s amazing how strong our emotions can be….

The book of Deuteronomy is an example of the importance and power of story