

# St Stephens 10:00am Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May Easter VI and Mothers' Day

Allan Blyth

## “Just One Imperative”

Acts 10: 44-48; Psalm 98; 1John 5: 1-12 and John 15: 9-17

Key Text: “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11b,12

You may think this sermon title doesn't make sense. You are right!!

An imperative is the vital, the crucial thing, the essential thing. Simply, “The Imperative” would do.

Having clarified the title some may be asking, “What is it?” - this vital, urgent thing of most importance.

e.g. In a drought, it is imperative that food and water is made available for the farmers' animals.

In a community stricken with substance abuse a moral imperative is to provide support and training.

Before the last election Mike Baird argued that for our economic future it was imperative to lease the poles and wires. Others argued it was imperative not to. Different people inevitably have different ideas of what may be imperative.

Is there an imperative for us?

Today's scriptures answer with a loud “Yes there is!” Yes, there is an imperative for life, there is an imperative for the Church, for the whole of creation.

In our community we could ask:

Is the imperative to ensure all people have the basic necessities of life, love, shelter, food clean water and access to health and education?

Nationally is it to ensure that the disadvantaged and marginalised are helped to catch up?

Is it that foreigners and refugees are welcomed?

Or is it research and infrastructure development?

Surely it is to ensure employment opportunities and for those unable to work, adequate support!

In the church and our personal lives, is it personal devotion to the scriptures and to prayer?

Or is it majestic worship faithful to our wonderful heritage?

Is it hospitality, e.g. wearing easy-to-read name badges as a warm welcome sign to newcomers?

Could it be maintaining sacred places, such as St Stephens as a testimony to the place of Christ in our nation?

Or is the imperative to have a visionary, fearless leader to take us into the future?  
Or a great preacher who can expound the scriptures intelligently & maintain sound doctrine?

Or could it be holiness, faithfulness in marriage, sexual purity and the rejection of all the works of evil

Is the imperative pastoral care, care for the aged and the unborn, the unemployed, sick and lonely

Or, is it the sacraments: baptism, the Holy Communion, or, Bible Study, the spiritual disciplines and practicing our God given spiritual gifts?

Could it be our response to Jesus' plea for the unity of those for whom he prayed, our commitment to ecumenism and co-operation?

Are there more possibilities?

Well yes, self-denial, personal poverty, fasting, meditation ... but none of these is the one imperative highlighted by today's lectionary readings.

All are important, all invite our attention.

They could usefully form a check list for ongoing review in our church and in our lives, but not one of them is the imperative highlighted by today's lection.

The imperative I draw from today's scriptures, the one imperative for every person in this room, the imperative for St Stephens and for every church community everywhere is the word of God, that, *life is in His Son*. Life is in His Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God, does not have life. 1 Jn 5:12

Do you have the Son? Are you keen to be with him, to worship him, delighting in His ways, thirsty for His Word and partnering in his mercy mission to the world?

Are we sensing His love so much greater and more beautiful than even the perfect love of the best mother, or the ideal father?

Have you repented of sin in your life, of being Mr or Miss Independent, of not giving God first place in your life?

Have you accepted the incredible gift of Jesus Christ? His life laid down for you? For your total pardon? Cf. Col2:14 every error, every unkindness, every lie, deleted, by His healing love, dissolving all shame, all prejudice, every bitterness.

Cornelius and those with him were filled with the Holy Spirit on receiving the news brought by Peter Acts 10:43 that "everyone who believes in Him (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through His name. We can be too, when we recognise that Jesus has chosen us as his own and for a purpose, to bear fruit, becoming beautiful like him and in so doing draw others too, to the acceptance of the Son, that they may have life.

Things can block our relationship with Jesus. A man who loved the Lord served the church with joy and devotion but after some upset with a new minister, he never went to church again. The hurt was strong. He would drop his wife off and pick her up afterwards.

Decades on, hospitalised after a heart attack and facing death, on arriving at his bedside he said to me, "I was hoping you'd come". As I read Psalm 23 his hand squeezed mine again and again. I asked, "Is the Lord Jesus your Shepherd?" Tears rolled down his cheeks as he nodded yes, and only hours after a prayer of confession and reaffirmation of faith in Jesus, he went to the Lord in peace & joy.

Cf 1 Jn 5, 2 & 3 Children of God love God and keep his commands. This can take effort, discipline, work.. What sort of work are we putting in to our relationship with Jesus now that we have this eternal life through the Son?

Jesus commands, "Abide in my love." Jn 15:9c

Here is the "Just One Imperative" for every church and each individual.

To have life, to experience growth, to live to the full, we need the Son.

Cf Ph 4:13 "I can do all things through Him..."

Do we need to rekindle our relationship with Jesus? Today we can say, "Lord Jesus you love me. You died for me. You won full pardon for me. ....Forgive me Jesus. I've not been putting much time into our relationship. Take me Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins, empower me by your Spirit to live the abundant life and bear much fruit for your glory, and for the extension of your Kingdom." AMEN