

Sermon Trinity 1, 6 June 2021 - 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1, Mark 3: 20-35

*Lord God, help us through your Holy Spirit live our lives to your glory and trust in your truth. Amen*

I must admit I found these passages pretty tough when I first read them - I don't know what jumped out at you - but for me it was Jesus seemingly to demote his close family members in favour of people eagerly wanting to follow his teaching - and the strong admonition...that blaspheming against the Holy Spirit could never be forgiven - both very uncomfortable thoughts and huge fuel to the fire of any critics of my Christian faith - how do I answer people on those? And then how does the reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians relate at all to this? The link seems to be the Holy Spirit - the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of truth, the spirit poured in our hearts by God when we trust and believe in Jesus, the Son of the living God.

And the Corinthians reading is actually very positive and encouraging for followers of Christ and our belief in eternal life, a place with God that is far better than what we are experiencing now on earth *"v17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,"*

Some of you listening to this will be young, fit and healthy(although all those terms are relative!) but as we age and become more frail or succumb to various diseases, or if you have always suffered from a disability, this following is the verse is for you (and definitely for me!)

*V16 "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. "*

In other words as followers of Christ, we are letting the Holy Spirit grow within us, both energising us and comforting us: bringing us closer to God. And v5 speaks of the enormous Christian hope in life after death , in eternal life where we shall be at one with God, sins forgiven and made whole, all because of our Saviour Jesus Christ actually died for our sins and then broke the bonds of death, finally ascending to heaven, a building from God which has many dwelling places (John 14: v2)and where Jesus has prepared a place for us as well.

ch5 v1 *"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."*

Now let's look at the Holy Spirit as mentioned in the Gospel:

*'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' — 30 for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'*

This sounds very scary stuff, but it is only scary for those who don't accept Jesus for who he is. The scribes, powerful authorities on the Jewish law, say he is blaspheming because he forgives sins and they believe only God can do that, therefore by inference Jesus is claiming to be God. He doesn't act like one of them, although he has studied the Scriptures, he mixes with the wrong type of people- outcasts, women, the poor and needy. They can't accept that , so say that his power to renounce the evil spirits must therefore come from another power: Satan. that Jesus's spirit , the Holy Spirit, is unclean - a much bigger blasphemy. But Jesus is quick to point out how illogical anyway their argument is- if it is Satan that is casting out demons from people , he is working against himself and eventually will destroy his own satanic kingdom- would Satan do that? , so it must be the greater power of God's love - through Jesus - that is casting out the demons which everyone has seen Jesus do.

The scribes cannot see good (in Jesus) but only evil - and say he has an unclean spirit - thus blaspheming against the Holy Spirit within Jesus. A person can only receive forgiveness when they repent . The scribes will never receive forgiveness (and therefore will be guilty of eternal sin) because they think they don't need to repent, because they have switched evil and good around and can't tell one from the other. They can't accept the truth of the Holy Spirit of God's love acting through Jesus , they think it must be Satan.

The scribes don't see that life becomes truly enriched and fulfilling when Jesus is put at the centre. Being brothers and sisters in Christ is energising, supportive and horizon-expanding. Allowing the Holy Spirit to turn us inside out, brings new perspectives and a keenness to act as followers of Jesus.

With COVID we have sorely missed the real space connection with wider family and very close friends and we have noticed the loss deeply - missing seeing the whole person, not distorted by shadows, harsh lighting or fuzzy pictures on a less than perfect internet connection, and most obviously missing the power of physical touch- a hug, a kiss, even a handshake. With COVID and the internet we have been living a kind of 2 dimensional life rather than a 3D or even 4D one that embraces more of our senses.

But how much have we noticed the loss or loosening of *church* family ties?- the meetings in person, just seeing people in passing in the churchyard or town with the opportunity to say “ How are you doing?” or “ oh I just wanted to ask you .....” and see from the person’s face or demeanour, speed of walking or who they are with, something more than a Zoom encounter or phone call can let on, and which will shape our thoughts and actions - maybe this person really isn’t coping and needs the support that being part of the church family can give.

The links of church togetherness - yes the church hall does need a spruce up, let’s do it; the sense of mystery and wonder and peace that is found by so many just entering our beautiful church building, oh we really do need to help out with the roof restoration in some way otherwise our building will disintegrate and cost even more thousands to restore in the future!- and perhaps reminding us of our desire for communal worship, holy communion and developing fellowship as the body of Christ.

So if we want to follow Jesus, we have to let his Holy Spirit reach us ,rekindle our love for God, who loved us first and so dearly wants us to turn towards him again and again as we stray from his path , who *is* ever ready to welcome and forgive when we say sorry, and to let the Holy Spirit propel us to act for Jesus, to dare to commit and renew and grow in our faith and move forward on our journey in whatever way Christ is calling us to.

So let’s listen to the Spirit of truth - follow Jesus’s example of including all - of standing up for the poor , the marginalised, the downtrodden, the sick – remember ,the Spirit of truth will always act out of love for other, not love of self.

Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to give us courage to question the status quo when we see it doesn’t fit God’s ways - Would Jesus have been happy to see the seering inequality between rich and poor; the way we are only really paying lip service to addressing the climate crisis which threatens to destroy God’s whole creation; the way you will even today struggle much more in the world if you are not a white, straight male; how we in rich western countries turn a blind eye to warfare and famine because it is not in our back yard and we want to protect our own nation’s wellbeing - our “national family.”

Jesus is telling us in this reading that there is a greater relationship to be had with him than a blood relative- ***it is the one of a disciple*** - following in his footsteps to spread the unbounded love of God for all people - Jesus says these people are his true family - you didn’t have to be part of his human family to be Jesus’s brothers, sisters, or mother, you just had to do God’s will and you qualified as part of his family. And it’s as true today as it was when he first spoke those radical words. v35 “*Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.*”

- Do you feel part of St Mary’s and St Margaret’s church family, valued and included ? I really hope so. Maybe you have been for years or maybe you are just discovering the joy and fellowship, energy and self-worth , peace and strength that comes from following Christ.

**Let’s take the easing of lockdown restrictions to really come together again as one and live a 3D not a 2D life for Jesus as his brothers and sisters in God’s family!**

Amen

Katrina Nice, 6.6.21

