

Immanuel, 10th July 2022

Colossians 1; 1-14

Maturing

A letter came this week, and half way through I came across this paragraph, which I thought I would like to read to you - *"...since the day we heard it (your faith), we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power..."* (Colossians 1; 9-11)

Can you imagine receiving a letter that includes these words? I have gone back to these I do not know how many times the last few days, and they never cease to amaze me, because they are filled with love, with kindness; they are also words that challenge us on the way, because we aren't always "there" are we? And they include the wish for the way ahead. What I like about the reading, and this is why I chose it for today, is that it reminds us we are on a journey, not having reached destination yet, and so we are maturing in life, in our faith, in our commitment. What the author calls 'giving fruit.' Thanks be to God for this!

This letter is filled with words that are inspiring and gentle reminders to love others, and while on one hand it is intimate and close related, on the other hand it is cosmic, inviting us to go beyond the difficulties and disagreements in life, which will be there, as we know. It was written in a time in which most people in the wider world believed in many gods, so were struggling with the idea that faith in Jesus (only in Jesus) was enough, and we live in a world today where many people believe something similar - **is Jesus enough?** So the big question is still around: what kind of power does Jesus really have? It is not a long letter, you might like to read it all, just to discover how it speaks to you in these times, what it helps with, and what you find difficult.

In general, it is agreed that this is not a letter written by Paul, but certainly by somebody who knew well what Paul thought, someone of the closest circle of Paul's group. Probably written between years 61-63. From the letter itself we can discover that Paul did not know the community in person, and they did not know him; what Paul knows is what he has been told by Epaphras (see vs. 4 and 7).

As all letters written by Paul, the first verses follow a similar pattern:

1. **Who writes:** As I said, not Paul himself, but once close to Paul using Paul's identity - This was quite an accepted way of doing things in those times!
2. **To whom it is written**
3. **Blessing**

Only then addressing the issue/s needed. By definition, the word "apostle" means 'one who is sent' (by Jesus). And Paul was sent by the Risen Jesus, after the encounter on the way to Damascus. The faith of the community is known to Paul, and he values this. They love each other deeply as a gift of the Spirit. And the author not only encourages them but promised them his prayers so that they may live lives worthy of Lord, and this will become the good fruits. They are saints, and we are called to be saints. That does not mean what is usually used

in saying a saint, the biblical meaning of saint refers to *individuals who have dedicated themselves to the worship and service of the one true God as revealed through his Son, Jesus Christ*. So hopefully we can see ourselves as saints.

And the letter continues to remind them (and us today) that it is also a journey from darkness to light, and in this journey we discover the full meaning of living in Christ: the forgiveness of sins.

I know last Sunday I was emphatic on our calling of breaking down walls and barriers, and I have not changed my mind on this, I continue to believe this is one of the greatest challenges placed before us. I also recognise that we need to be reminded of the love of God that forgives, the love of God that encourages, as “Paul” does in this letter – living lives worthy of our Lord. Challenge without love is empty, it is in being reminded that we are loved by God and called to love one another that we are better, that we become the living saints of God.

And this is what I wanted to share today – our lives are on the permanent experience of maturing, of growing in that worthiness, of travelling from darkness to light. Of being a blessing to others. Last Tuesday a couple of us met as part of the prayer group – what keeps this group going, sometimes with more, sometimes with less people present, is the belief that the prayer of the community of faith, for the community of faith and the wider community keeps us going, encourages us and strengthens us. And that is what “Paul” is doing in this letter to the community of the Colossians.

So as this letter begins, let me end today: Grace and Peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen