

Sermon 9th after Trinity 2016
Luke 11: 1-13

Hosea 1: 2-10, Col 2: 6-15,

Today I'm taking my theme from Paul's letter to the Colossians.

It's a wonderful passage that still speaks to us today.

It includes a theological argument and ethical instructions, in a way that we can relate to.

Paul strives to teach the Colossians that they are forgiven through Christ's death and made full citizens of the kingdom of Christ to whom they now owe complete allegiance and obedience.

Also what is emphasized is Christ's identity as the perfect revelation of God and the singular source of wisdom about how to live rightly.

The main focus is on the significance of the cross and the change in believers' destiny achieved by it. Paul looks at the past and the present; he says the law that has been taught is now in the past. He sums up the Jewish calendar, new moons mark the beginning of each lunar month; he explains that matters of food and drink and observing festivals are just a shadow of what is to come. The human way of thinking pales into insignificance to what is to come from God in Christ.

Paul uses the analogy of the body, he says, "The whole body nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows with a growth that is from God."

When Paul talks about the body he means the church and so it is the church's growth which depends solely upon the adherence, the faithfulness to Christ, the head.

Understanding this is the only way the church will grow and that was as true for the Colossians as it is for us today.

We are about the business of Christ and each of us that proclaim to be Christians are called to discipleship. We are called to show our community of which we live that we are Christians and not just a club that meets on a Sunday morning and lives by rules that were set in the past. We are always, firstly, to be a church that adheres to Christ's teachings.

Jesus was a rebel in his time, but unlike many he was a rebel with a cause, he upset the law makers, because he knew there was a better way. Jesus worked

for the disadvantage, he welcomed all. He didn't disqualify anyone from the kingdom of God, and we have to follow this teaching. We are all equal in Christ and for those who come to us seeking to know something about the Christian faith we are to welcome them into the fellowship of Christ's Church, the body.

Tomorrow is the feast day of St James the apostle, the reading for that day is taken from Matthew's gospel.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came before Jesus and asked Jesus to declare that these two sons of mine will sit one at Jesus' right and one at his left in the kingdom. Jesus said you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink my cup? James and John replied 'we are able.' Jesus said you indeed will, but to sit on my right or my left is for God to decide, whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many.

It's never about what we can achieve for ourselves but about what we do for others, St James learnt that from the mouth of Jesus, and indeed later from Jesus' death. James, certainly, was able to drink the cup that Jesus was about to drink, which was allotted by God. James died in Jerusalem about 44 AD and is thought to be the first martyr among the apostles.

But like James, sometimes we have to be reminded of our calling to serve. And perhaps the easiest way to do this is to show love and kindness to those that seek us out, or those that cross our paths.... Well ok I know it isn't that easy, but really it is the only message that we need and I've been reminded of that just recently; both the wedding and baptism I took last week chose the passage about love from Paul's letter to the Corinthians and Roz has chosen the same reading tomorrow for Steve's funeral, it is universal and it reminds us of what our calling is about.

If I speak in tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have faith, so as to move mountains but do not have love I am nothing.

I think this helps to sum up today's reading. If we are not rooted in Christ, if we are not baptised, which is what Paul means when he says "you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, then we are not spiritually alive, and we will struggle to show love.

God made us alive when he forgave us all our trespasses, he erased the record of debt that stood against us. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. And he disarmed the rulers and authorities triumphing over them.

We are one in Christ, no-one is more important than the other, we will soon have four church buildings in our benefice, each place of worship will be of the same importance, each beautiful in their own right. But they are the buildings not the church; the church is the people and we are all one church. Sadly, we don't always remember this because our buildings hide the fact.

Our main purpose of being church is to worship God through Christ and to follow Christ's teachings, loving each other and showing that love which comes from Christ to those who are yet to understand.

The only way to grow the church, the kingdom of God is to care more about the people than we do about our buildings, and to put the needs of others before our own needs. And to be thankful for what we have.

The beginning of Paul's letter to the Colossians, we heard today, sums this up

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Amen.