

## **Galatians sermon series week 2**

### **05/06/16 09:30 St Peter**

I wonder if you've decided whether you're in or out? It seems that question is all that matters on our news and current affairs programmes at the moment. As June 23rd fast approaches, if we're going to vote (which I hope we all will) then we need to fairly soon decide which way we're going to cast our votes. In or Out of Europe?

The referendum campaign so far has helped some to make a decision, and certainly put off others. But most people seem to agree that there is value in both decisions - in and out. Many people that I speak to about the subject seem to be struggling to make a decision. In or out- which way to vote?

In and out would certainly be something on the minds of St Paul and those in Galatia he wrote to. Some of us were in Mapledurham last week to hear John's sermon at the start of this new sermon series. If you weren't, here is a little recap. We are thinking about Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Galatia was a area of central Asia in what we now call Turkey. We know Paul travelled to the newly emerging church there in 47-48AD. And, once back in Jerusalem, in 49AD he wrote a letter to the Christians in Galatia. That Letter to the Galatians arises out of a context where Jewish Christians had begun to spread the Good News of Jesus to their non-Jewish Christian neighbours. Some of those who became followers of Jesus, or Christians as they became called, wanted to keep Jewish customs, and some didn't. Soon the church in Galatia begins to fall out - over that question: who is 'in' and who is 'out'. Were those who didn't keep Jewish customs, like circumcision and food rules, allowed to be Christians? How do you treat someone who is not like yourself? Do we build bridges to other people, or walls to keep them out? Paul, and his friend Barnabas, were sent to Galatia to sort out the problems.

Suddenly we might see a link with where we are in the European Referendum. Whilst immigration is a key issue dominating this last week of debate, other parts of the referendum debate also focus on how we relate to other people of Europe who are not British. Is it essential that we have control of our own borders, our own laws, our own economic policy? Or can we knowingly hand over some of the control of those to our neighbours, and in doing so create something stronger and better? You will have to decide that in how you vote.

But how we relate to the other person was as much a question for the new Christian church as it is for Europe today.

Paul's answer, found in these opening verses of his letter, is to remind people that he is an Apostle of Jesus. 'Apostle' means messenger. So he is reminding the Galatians that he is merely a messenger for God in Jesus. He, as the messenger, is not important. What is important for the Galatians to remember is their higher calling.

It is God's love for all people, freely offered - what the Bible calls Grace - that should be the focus of Christians lives. Instead, the Church of Galatia has become focussed on its own squabbles - can the Good News of Jesus be for people who aren't Jews?

How easy it has always been for the Church to prioritise its own squabbles, over the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ. Even today, the Church around the world finds the need to obsess about details - who is right, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal? Issues of sex and money. And we forget our higher calling, to live and proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

And this question of In or Out stands at the heart of Millie and Arlo's baptism today. If baptism means anything, it is a firm statement in public that we are 'in' with God. Millie and Arlo's parents

and godparents commit to following Christ, to bringing up their children in the ways of God. For the Good News of God's Love in Jesus is not restricted to anyone - it is offered freely to Millie, and Arlo. And it offered to each one of us today. Whether we are here in Church each week, or it has been ages since we were last in church. God reaches out to us in Love - we will open our hearts to receive it?

For if we learn anything from this Letter to the Galatians, it will be to remind ourselves to focus on that essential truth of our faith. That in Christ we find God wanting to draw us closer to him - if we will only accept the invitation. With God - the invite is always to be 'in'.

As for Europe - you will have to decide!