

Galatians week 5 Gal 3:21-29 and 4:1-11 (Gospel John 17:20-26)

This week has seen some seismic shifts in international politics, hasn't it? On Thursday we were being told the result was too close to call, but there were hints the Remain camp were slightly ahead. But by the early hours of Friday morning it was clear that that wasn't the case. And as the news of Brexit became certain our Prime Minister announced his intention to stand down, and political analysts went into overdrive trying to explain the potential consequences, and politicians all over Westminster, and indeed all over Europe tried to work out their next move.

So much of the news since then has been about division, separation, leaving, unamicable divorce, the potential break up of the union, and whichever way you voted or however you feel about it now, there is no denying that we are a nation that is divided, into two almost equal halves. And whilst many are rejoicing and excited about new possibilities, many others are hurting and grieving and asking what on earth have we done?

So this morning, as we continue our journey through Galatians, it feels hugely significant to me that a central

theme of our passage this morning is unity – not the unity that comes through political alliances, nor the unity that comes when we stand together against another group with whom we disagree, but the unity that is possible in Christ, where there is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female – a unity that draws us together into one family, as brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father, and citizens of a heavenly country that knows no borders.

As Christians I believe we have something to say, something to offer, in a divided world.

But Paul was writing to a divided church, as we have seen over the past few weeks.

There were Jewish Christians, and there were Gentile Christians, and some of the Jewish Christians were saying that the Gentile converts to Christianity now had to obey the Jewish laws, and in particular they had to be circumcised in order to become part of God's family.

And in this letter Paul is saying, "Rubbish!" And he has been explaining very carefully, and with a lot of deep and rather complicated theology, that though God gave the Law to his people it was only given as a temporary

strategy. Centuries before God had promised Abraham that all the world would be blessed through a descendant of his, but in the meantime he gave the Law to his people as a sort of babysitter.

Paul argues that the purpose of the Law was never to make God's people righteous, because they were never able to obey it. For Paul, the purpose of the Law was to show people their sin, and their need of a saviour.

And in the first passage that was read today Paul uses two striking similes to describe what life is like for those who are 'Under the Law': First in 3v23 he says it's like being kept prisoner, or held in custody; and secondly in v24 he says it's like having a disciplinarian who is always snarling at you. That analogy is slightly lost on us, but in Paul's day it was common for boys to be put in the charge of a sort of 'tutor' (a *paidagogos* in the Greek), whose role was to escort the boy to and from school and to generally be in charge of their conduct. They were often cruel and beat the boys into obedience, and in ancient drawings they are often shown with a rod in their hand.

So Paul is saying life 'Under the Law' is like that –being told what to do, being warned of the consequences of disobedience, and when we do fail we're hit with

condemnation. There's no escape - nothing we do can ever deliver us from its tyranny!

It's a very depressing picture!

It's a bit like trying your best all the time, but all you ever hear is, "You're a failure!" or "Try harder!"

Do you get the picture?

But it doesn't have to be that way any longer, says Paul. In v25 there is a wonderful, "But now!"

V25 "But now faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

Now there is freedom from that horrible nagging voice of condemnation.

Christ delivers us from the prison and the mean tutor.

How? By dying for us and rising again.

Ch 4v4 In the fullness of time God sent his Son – Jesus – born of a woman– so fully man; Born under the law – born a Jew, who then lived in perfect obedience to the law and was therefore righteous; why did that matter? In order that he could redeem those under the law.

Jesus died on the cross, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God – whoever we are, and whatever our background.

The same Law convicts both Jew and Gentile of their need of forgiveness.

And for both Jew and Gentile, the way of salvation, the way of being put right with God is just the same: faith in Christ.

And when we put our faith in Christ, and are baptised into Christ, something quite incredible happens.

We are clothed in Christ, clothed in his righteousness, set free from all condemnation, and most important of all we become children of God, children of a heavenly Father who looks at us not with disapproval, but with love, adoration and delight.

So let's pause there just for a moment, and let me ask you a question.

When you imagine God looking at you, what do you see?

Do you see a frown, and hear a stern voice telling you off, or telling you to try harder?

Or do you see a Father who delights in you, hear a Father who rejoices over you with singing, a Father who comes running to greet you, just as the father in the story of the prodigal son runs to meet his wayward son, and who then throws a party to welcome him home?

Most of us find it hard, deep down, to really grasp the depth of God's love for us.

We find it much easier to hear the voice of the nasty tutor, telling us our faults, telling us we need to try harder to be acceptable to God.

But if we start listening to that nagging voice, and start trying to earn God's favour by what we do, we find ourselves going back into slavery, living as though we are still under the Law, just as some of the Galatian Christians were, and living as slaves rather than as sons or daughters of God.

God has adopted us into his family. He has given us his Holy Spirit, and it's the Holy Spirit that reveals to us the truth that we are children of God.

V 6 "Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba, Father!'" Abba was the way a Jewish adult would refer to their own father.

It's the Holy Spirit who reveals to us that we are children of God, sons and daughters of the King, adopted into his family and heirs of a glorious inheritance.

The Jewish Christians needed to know that they were no longer slaves, trying to please or even appease God by dutiful obedience to the law. They were his dearly loved children. The Gentile Christians needed to know that it was their faith in Christ that brought them into God's family, not obedience to the Law.

All of them needed to know that they were children of the same Father, united in Christ, saved by grace through faith in Christ.

And so do we.

We need to know not just in our heads, but deep in our hearts that we are dearly loved children of God. We need to know deep in our hearts that we have been set free from condemnation, that we have been saved by the grace of God, that we are heirs with Christ.

And we need to remember, too, that those things are true for all who are in Christ, regardless of colour, nationality, language, sex, or even which way we voted in the referendum.

If we are in Christ, we are brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father. And he asks us to love one another. Why? So that everyone, in England, in Great Britain, in Europe, and throughout the world, will know that we are his disciples, followers of Christ, in whom there is no East or West or North or South.

Let's pray