

Galatians sermon series week 7

10/07/16 08:00 & 09:30 St Peter

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In our readings this morning Paul is again speaking to the Galatians .Paul realises that there is something missing in these believers, and asks them whether they really know what it's like to walk in the Holy Spirit?. And you pick up the feeling that their response is probably, "WHAT?" not at all sure what he is talking about. So he enquires a bit deeper, and finds that they hadn't actually heard the full Good News about Jesus at all, So he has to give them a quick crash course on what salvation is all about, so they can be baptised into Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was there when the world was made. The Holy Spirit was there when Jesus was baptised. The Holy Spirit was very much there when Judith was ordained last week -the Holy Spirit is here with us now this very moment this morning! I am continuing this morning with the theme set out in Galatians --as you know this has been covered in the last few weeks by everyone preaching in all our churches....but this morning I feel very distracted having witnessed man's inhumanity to man up close last week! We have read and watched ugly scenes since Brexit on our TV screens-Andrew our Bishop has alerted all clergy to what horrible racism is going on in this area. Well- I witnessed just that a terrible scene of human abuse in Broad Street -when a young black youth was knocked to the ground outside of M&S- a mob quickly gathered shouting abuse "go home you filthy nigger " they shouted-over and over again- aiming kicks and spitting on his helpless body as they shouted! The police quickly appeared from somewhere and the abusers escaped! This is Reading England not Dallas America -I guess it's rife in Caversham as well-where will our first shooting/stabbing be?

However do we respond! Especially after Paul's long teaching about what we should do and be as Christians!

Where is the Holy Spirit in this - Poor Paul -he was disappointed so many times by his deviant brethren and here they were again going their own sweet way. So what God, the Holy Spirit did for the Galatians– through baptism, enabled them to "take the lid off themselves", be cleansed and made fit for service, and then God could fill them and use them. As Christians, we believe that the Holy Spirit is one of the Persons of the Trinity. We worship one God, not three, we worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

When this horrific event happened in Broad St-I wanted to disappear into John Lewis-run away-a good human response you might say-nothing wrong with that! But my collar doesn't allow me to do that! –I need to be visible! Collar or not- being a Christian immediately puts us all into the forefront of EVIL however frightened we are-if we run away who will stand! Remember Ephesians ch 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil....put on the whole armour of God and STAND! I don't know what would have happened but I remember feeling relief when the police appeared and I could step back-phew!

Now, there are various ways we can react to this sort of sermon. We can reckon it doesn't apply to us – God wouldn't use us anyway we think -he knows how I hate violence we say- he wouldn't expect it of us-would he?. But, in fact, that's not true. God can use you, wants to use you, and very probably already does use you, if you have made yourself available to him. If you are sincere in wanting to be God's person, then God will use you.

You can also react to this sort of sermon by feeling guilty. There's nothing wrong in running away so many people did when it came to the crunch –even the disciples fled when it got too much for them! You feel that if only you were holier, or more pious, or a better Christian, or even a better person, God could use you more – you would stay -be courageous. But that's also not really a sensible response. You see, it isn't about you trying harder. You don't have to be perfect before God. Rather the reverse – in fact!

All we have to do is to be WILLING- to let God work in us, be willing to co-operate with God, if you like. God the Holy Spirit will, if we ask, come and dwell in us, cleanse us, fill us, renew us, make us whole – and then we can be used.. We can become the sort of person Paul described, full of those qualities – I hope we see the Holy Spirit cleansing us, renewing us, enabling us, to be Christians. . I hope we see those lovely characteristics that Paul described to the Galatians that a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit will have: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, loving-kindness, faith....

Not that we can probably see it in ourselves – these qualities are always easier to see in other people . But I hope we do see them in one another, and affirm them in each other. .After all, no matter how freely we are able to talk about our faith – and for some of us, that comes easier than for others, I do know – it is whether our lives match up to what we talk about that is important, that either attracts or repels other people to Jesus. If we say one thing, but do another, then people are going to be turned off. If we don't behave the way Jesus describes His people as behaving – always putting other people first, always treating other people with the greatest possible respect -for who they are, not neglecting our families and so on; if we forget that, then maybe people will wonder whether faith is worth the effort!

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.. In our Gospel reading Jesus came amongst them and breathed the Holy Spirit into them-they immediately became powerful ready to go out and heal, inspire, share the good news of love!

God the Holy Spirit was present at creation. He was present when Jesus was baptised. He was present when the Galatians were baptised. And He is present here with us, now, today....Without the Holy Spirit we are nothing we run away, life frightens us-with the Holy Spirit we carry all the attributes above and we STAND fearlessly-face life whatever it brings us!

LET US PRAY

Lord we pray that you will fill us anew, cleanse us, make us whole, both for our sakes and so that you can use us in your service. This we ask in the power of that same Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ your Son, who died for us. Amen.