

# **Galatians series week 4**

## **19/06/16 09:30 St Peter**

## **& 11:15 St Margaret**

I wonder if I were to ask you "where are we?", what you might answer? Perhaps you're now wondering whether I've lost it, and finally gone mad?! Where are we? You might say, "In church of course". Or if you want to be slightly more expansive, then "In Caversham, or Berkshire or Britain" would all do.

But what if I asked you to apply that question to us as a church? Where are we? Well that becomes another question altogether. Because I am asking you to take stock. What makes us who we are, and what defines us as a church?

These last two days a number of us have been meeting in Burghfield for the latest PMC teaching weekend. People from 10 or more groups of churches have met together to think through where we are as churches. Towards the end of our first year of being on the PMC journey, we were reminded this weekend of what PMC is all about. PMC is about:

1. Arriving at where we are
2. So that we might discover whose we are
3. That God might use us as part of God's mission that is already taking place around us.

That first step, "Arriving where we are" is a strange phrase, but worded very carefully. We have spent the majority of this first year arriving where we are. Understanding ourselves better, and God has already blessed us. And understanding our location better, and what is already going on in our community. This first step of PMC works on the assumption, evidenced over many years of working with churches, that we are very bad at understanding where we are, and all the time imagine that we are somewhere else in a journey. So our PMC Steering Team have been helping to guide us to arrive where we are - where we actually are.

It is from that place of arriving where we are, that we might discover whose we are. For it is from knowing ourselves well and our context, that we might discover more about our God. The essentials of our faith:

- of a God who creates us and loves us so much
- who, to draw us back to himself send his Son to teach us, die for us, and offer us new life and hope
- and who doesn't abandon us, but offers his creation his Spirit that we might have the power to work for God's coming Kingdom on earth.

That is the faith we proclaim each Sunday, and each Church year in our worship, and in our prayers. But PMC reminds us that the Spirit of God is not restricted to only working in God's church. God's Spirit comes to all of his creation, whom Christ died to redeem. So God by his Spirit is as much out there in the world, doing God's Mission, as he is in his Church. The task for the Church is, knowing this truth about God, to discover where God is and to join in that mission.

That's the PMC journey - discovering where we are, and whose we are, that we might join in with God's mission right here.

And all of that journey, including its high and lows, the joys and struggles is to be found in Paul's writing to the Galatians. For Paul had encountered a growing community of new Christians in

Galatia. But on returning to Jerusalem, he hears that some of those who have found faith in Christ who are not Jews, are now being excluded by those Christians who are Jewish in origin. And Peter, or Cephas as he is named in our first reading (his Greek name), is at the head of this movement to exclude them. So Paul and Peter get into their disagreement. Who is to be excluded or included. For Paul, it is the Grace of God offered in Jesus Christ - freely offered not deserved - that is the redemption of humanity. It is not by sticking to human rules - whether of society, or religion. It is realising whose we are - redeemed by Jesus Christ - that allows us to be set free to undertake God's mission. Peter wanted Christianity to be confined to the Jewish rules of purity and the teaching of the Torah. Paul saw that faith was enough - believe and be set free.

These passages are leading up to the central climax of this letter, which we will come to next week: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." God chooses who he chooses and will not be confined to those we prefer. God's mission is beyond us and ahead of us. God challenges us to be know where we are, and to be confident in whose we are. And from there to look for signs of God already at work, and to join in.