

St Nicholas, 0800 Year C,

6<sup>th</sup> October, 2019

## **New People**

Ephesians 5:1-20

Psalm 18:48-52

Luke 18:31-43

Find Ephesians 5 and focus on the first two verses: Compare it as I read from *The Message* which is a paraphrase of the text.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (Msg) “Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behaviour from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.” This opens up the text giving a fresh view. Does it help us understand it?

### **1. Introduction.**

a) The Bible contains all sorts of characters who despite their reluctance, even their weaknesses, somehow God works through them and they allow God to do that, sharing in what He is saying and doing. They are alive! Moses and Abraham are examples. Jeremiah was a man like that, with a reluctant response that is very clear: The Lord speaks to him: “Before I formed you in the womb I

knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Now the reluctance - Jeremiah, said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for ... you shall go.. Whatever I command you, you shall speak.”<sup>1</sup> That is clear, precise, no mucking about.

Jeremiah, despite being chosen, called, sent out, gets worn down, protests to God - no super-hero here - he’s absorbed in self-pity, wants to give this prophecy stuff away, but then a reprimand from the Lord: “If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses?”<sup>2</sup> “What do you want to achieve Jeremiah? Riches, a long life, power or running away to seek wisdom, growth, maturity in the Lord?” “Your way or my way”, says the Lord? “You have a choice, Jeremiah, to live cautiously, comfortably - or courageously? Do not stop now! What is it you really want? Follow the mob, or to run with horses?” Jeremiah thought about it, he would have tossed, turned in uncertainty. He did respond - not with words, but with his whole life, which said “I’ll compete with the horses.”<sup>3</sup> God’s way, not the way of the world, not the way of the self-centred!

b) And that is the point in being a follower of Jesus. This is what Paul is saying as he writes to the Ephesians. He has spelled out what it means to be ἐν Χριστῷ - in Christ, and in these later

chapters he makes clear how that works for his chosen, called, sent people. That is who we are - a huge demanding challenge for us, in its various ways - either amongst the safe, the comfortable, or do we dare run with horses - full of life, adventure with Jesus. It is a wonderful picture, bringing to mind *Chariots of Fire*. It is only we who make being a Christian boring!

b) Ephesians has told us that God “chose us in (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”<sup>4</sup> That is mind-boggling in itself. We have been showered with the riches of Christ “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...”<sup>5</sup>

It is only as we begin to grasp, take hold of, what God has done for us, given to us, that our hearts are warmed, that we must praise, worship - there is no alternative, we can do no other!. Chesterton once said, that “The worst moment for an atheist is when he feels a profound sense of gratitude and has no one to thank.”

“It is when you and I become ‘lost in wonder, love and praise’ that we really are functioning as God means us to function in Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Ephesians insists that we always start with God, not with ourselves, and **our** needs. “We praise you O God, we acknowledge you to be the Lord. All creation worships you, the Father

everlasting.”<sup>7</sup> He is Lord of all. Worship is part of our DNA - cultivate it.

## 2. Chosen in Him.

a) It is pretty hard to take on board that we have been chosen, and then called to be part of God’s ministry in some way or another. Can you accept that you have been given a ministry by God? If so can you identify what it might be? Pray about that! We, you, are God’s agents in this world - holy and blameless before Him!<sup>8</sup> That is some ask, especially as what follows in Ephesians 5, spells out the huge traps that surround us, and which have ensnared so many to wander, give up, remain unhealed.

Hear what Paul is saying. Christianity, of all faiths, would have the highest, strongest, sexual ethic. The NT teaches absolute chastity outside marriage, and **that** teaching of Jesus appears right here in 5:3 linked, interestingly enough, with “covetousness” - the “I want” - selfish greed. Our world today is something like the world of that time - anything goes with sex! But, writes Paul, such behaviour “must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”<sup>9</sup> We also know that Christians are not immune from that temptation! Could it be true that “our need for sexuality in love is a result of our not possessing God - (who is love itself)” Is it a desire, a temptation to have, that love we **can** only achieve (ἐν Χριστῷ)?<sup>10</sup>

A story is told of a young mother showing off her baby to her own mother. The young mother said she was surprised that the baby had dark hair, since both she and her husband were fair. The older woman said, "Yes but your own father has dark hair". The daughter responded, "Yes, mother, but I am adopted." With an embarrassed smile the older woman uttered words which were wonderful for her adopted daughter to hear, "I always forget."<sup>11</sup> That is God's love for us, to which we can respond.

Paul catalogues other forms of offensive behaviour, but notice how he sums it up: Such a person "has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."<sup>12</sup> Strong stuff, makes us uneasy, wriggle! Jesus came to plant the Kingdom of God - "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."<sup>13</sup> There is the tension, so, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added...."<sup>14</sup> Get it right, in perspective. Do we see ourselves as Kingdom people, Jesus reigning in our hearts, our foundation in life being built on the rock and not quicksand?

b) Paul also tells us there are "sons of disobedience....do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."<sup>15</sup> Paul is talking to converts from paganism where the ties, the pressures, could be pretty strong. Do

not turn off the light of faith, lose your first love of joy, stumble over the stones. Do not think that you have arrived, for there is always maturing work ahead. Isaiah warned us of that - stones: "Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people, build up, build up the highway; clear it of stones, (there it is)...."<sup>16</sup> A touch of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."<sup>17</sup>

Ever seen a paddock covered with, planted with stones, both small and large, lots of them. The farmer scratches his head - can this land be arable? - leave it or deal with it?" Being a farmer, he tackles the job, perseveres, until the soil is ready to receive the seed - then he plants.

And that is a picture of our lives - there are "stones" to be removed! They could be anything - different for all of us. Paul's short scattered list (3-5) is a good beginning, but there is more self-righteousness, making compromises, justifying ourselves, doubts, fear, even questioning God. Such stones left in the ground produce no crops, but once removed -voila - a good crop "growing up and increasing, yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."<sup>18</sup>

From Mark: 'It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person`s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these vile things

come from within; they are what defile you”<sup>19</sup> We are not mucking around here. Such “stones” **destroy unless dug out.**

God does not condemn us but He does require, need, clean vessels within His Kingdom, who produce fruit. This is what repentance is all about - digging out the stones, knowing that, with such repentance, God, through the work of the His crucified, risen Son will rip out such stones from our lives.<sup>20</sup>

Gloss over the stones, leave them in the ground - no change - can't be, disaster, darkness,<sup>21</sup> be forgiven, and grow in maturity ἐν Χριστῷ, - set free, walk in the light. “Repentance” is a whole talk in itself but forgiveness **is** the Lord's promise. There is always more as the Holy Spirit convicts, such as broken hearts, bitter roots (I met a man recently who had such a bitter root - would not listen), inability to forgive, an acerbic, sour tongue or the sickness unto death, which is “despair”.<sup>22</sup> Rather, “walk as children of light”<sup>23</sup> into the arms of Jesus, not the controlling grasp of the enemy, Satan.

### **3 Place of Worship**

a) Paul makes a play on “light” which both makes visible but also exposes the darkness. Children of light are, therefore, transparent, without guile,<sup>24</sup> causing Paul to share what could well

be a scrap of a hymn. Praise God that he does, for music and singing is very much part of our worship, both corporately, and when on our own. Do you ever sing to the Lord during the night, maybe as you begin to fall asleep. The little songs we sing help us to do that: So Paul perhaps sings "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."<sup>25</sup> (based on material from the OT.<sup>26</sup>)

Worship is very important in our lives because instead of taking in, as with teaching and preaching, focussing in on ourselves, true worship forces us to focus on God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit - give Him the glory. Some hymns tell us the Jesus story, whereas others express our thanksgiving, our praise, our love in the honouring of Jesus for His sacrifice, a recognition of who He is, what He is, together with the empowering of the Holy Spirit. This is light not darkness. This is freedom not captivity to the enemy's stranglehold on so many lives.

b) We are reflectors of the Light of the World who is Jesus, so, do "not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery (and is another escape), but be filled with the Spirit,"<sup>27</sup> Yes, there it is.

When Paul first visited Ephesus the question he asked them the church was: ""Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"... No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy



Spirit."<sup>28</sup>

We all are aware that the Church is only a pale imitation of what it could be. Why? Jeremiah gives us an answer: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."<sup>29</sup> There is the same contrast! Do it our way or God's way. Be filled with wine or Holy spirit. Which is it to be?

c) So what is this "filling" with Spirit? There are two main aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The person of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, God. "Do not

grieve the Holy Spirit."<sup>30</sup> - relationship, personal,, relationship stuff - our position εν Χριστω. And,

•the power of the Holy Spirit. In our weakness we are made strong.

"I can do everything through him (within His will" who gives me strength."<sup>31</sup>

This is why and how God takes people like you and me and uses us in His Kingdom work. Person and Power - relationship and spiritual strength. Relationship without prayer, action turns in on itself. Prayer and action in the Spirit without relationship soon dies.

It is this that builds relationships and a Church. It is this that enables God's purposes to be carried out, in freedom, in wholeness, in healing, in salvation.

As we walk in this light, this understanding, this experience,  
we will "Sing and make music in our hearts to the Lord, always  
giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our  
Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>32</sup>

Come, Holy Spirit!

SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD, (SoF 510)

Fall afresh on me;

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.