

St Paul's Day 2 July 2017
Acts 9:1-22

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwUWm_2h7ml

St Paul says, 'Jesus came to me, not in righteous anger or in judgement, but in love'..

'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends,'

'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'

These are some of the words of Paul I take to heart.. not wishy washy, but tough practical love..

Paul was convinced the gospel was for all. He was convinced that to follow the way of Christ you did not have to stick for instance to food that was Kosher. You did not have to have to take on all the requirements of the Mosaic law. He was convinced that the gospel was not dependent on any one cultural expression.

There are plenty of echoes in the New Testament of the conflicts that this produced. There were others who were just as sure that to follow the Way of Christ you also had to take on all the cultural taboos of Judaism. But in the end Paul's passionate convictions won the day. If they had not done so it's most unlikely we would be sitting here to-day.

From our perspective it's clear that he didn't follow through to all the logical consequences yet he insists that God is inclusive. He saw in his encounter with Christ, a God of compassion, who loves understands and forgives, who is much more concerned with how we express that love than with what we believe.

In the act of conversion God brings persecutor and persecuted together into a new family relationship where we would rather suffer and die for our brother or sister than fight with or hurt them.¹

¹ <https://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/worshipandmusic/sermon-archive/conversion-of-st-paul-ij>
by Ian Jagger

Paul's conversion experience changed him.. his direct challenge from Jesus, and Ananias' guts in accepting him without challenge, and without reference to his past, baptising him and including him.. the one who had breathed fire against the new Christian group only days earlier.. that radical acceptance, must have made a difference, on top of Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus.. his blindness, literal and metaphorical was cured..

So what does all this say to us, members of St Paul's in the 21st century?

Surely, it challenges us to look at our faith.

Do we put God first?

What is Jesus saying to us today?

'Build your life on me.. focus on relationship with me, love.'

Maybe he is not saying, 'Why are you persecuting me'? but is he saying 'I was hungry and thirsty and you did not feed me, in prison and you did not visit me, naked and you did not clothe me.

Homeless and you did not offer me a bed'... Is he saying that to us?

Or something else.. is he saying, 'thank you for your unconditional love in action'?

Is he saying 'see how they love one another'?

Look at the new pastoral care group that is about to form. Look at those who visit, those who call on those in need, drop off a meal, fix a tap, mow the lawn?

Is he saying look at those who care for their neighbour?

Look at those who visit the prison, give financially to the poor, to missions...

What is Jesus calling us to today? How do we love?

How do we serve those in need? We can't do everything..

We could point to: Tadpoles, mainly music, catering for funerals, kairos, nursing home services, home communions, mission helpers..

We could talk about nurturing our connection with God in Prayer and meditation, messy church, contemplative church, healing eucharist, Sunday morning and Wednesday morning worship, intercessory service, services at aged care facilities: Opal, Wilson, Ashleigh, quiet days, retreats..

We could talk about KYB, and other study groups..music gp and band, new youth group, men's gp, mission helpers..

People round the edges - hospitality - - arts gp, interplay, concerts, poetry soiree..

Today, we are Launching our website

.. there is all the work going on that no-one sees.. people in the office, others dusting, vacuuming, edging, polishing..

Today we are also making connections in the 21st century way.. do you know how many people check into facebook and read the Sunday sermons? Respond to invitations? Check out the bulletin? Check out the web site today, and share it with others!

We also need to continue to ask, 'where are the gaps?'

We, at St Paul's are 'People of Christian faith – Encouraging connection between the Divine and the every day', as our vision statement affirms, really nourishing our relationship with God, and sharing that with others, showing Christ's unconditional love in action.

Paul's letters reveal a remarkable human being: dedicated, compassionate, emotional, sometimes harsh and angry, clever and quick-witted, supple in argumentation, and above all possessing a soaring, passionate commitment to God, Jesus Christ, and his own mission. Fortunately, we have some of his letters to read. They constitute one of history's most remarkable personal contributions to religious thought and practice.

'Love bears all things, believes all things hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends,'

'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.'

There are suspicions, understandably, but people are won over by integrity.. by love, love, love...

Katherine Booth - daughter of Captain Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was the most successful evangelist in France ever.

Her first convert, in front of an entire congregation, tore a page out of the bible she'd just given him, rolled a cigarette out of it, lit it and blew three smoke rings in her face.. as a test.. Later, he realised that she loved him for who he was not for what he had done, and through that he discovered God's love and became a Christian, Katherine's first Christian convert..

Katherine Booth's philosophy on life was simple, 'love love, love'.

When she was challenged, 'Why are you preaching. You are a woman?' She answered, 'Look at the fruit of my speaking, there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus'.

St Paul would have applauded. He says, 'Without love we are nothing.'

'Come with me, I can't do this alone'...

Susanna