

2024 TALK FOR CAREY, 27.10.24, ROMANS 8:14-28, 1 COR. 1:1-9

'YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT...'

As I start this short series on Carey's mission, let us remind ourselves of the new mission statement we agreed for our church. We are called to be – what? Let's try to say this together: ***'A Christ-centred people, at the heart of Hemel Hempstead, showing God's love to our community'***. Alleluia! Praise God! What a wonderful calling ! What a daunting challenge too... !

God led me to Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, to help us in our thinking about how we might be a Christ-centred & mission-minded people. The focus for our challenging calling is right here in the introduction to Paul's letter. What a wonderful greeting to a most difficult letter... Paul begins by assuring those in Corinth of God's calling & purposes for them. And straight after these verses, Paul addresses a whole string of issues in the church, including disunity. We won't be tackling these difficult chapters during this short series, but will hop onto the closing chapters of this letter. (There may be another time when we can come back to these other chapters).

What struck me from Paul's verbal launch-pad is this - number of things here:

1) He describes his fellow Christians as 'sanctified in Christ Jesus'. And then he says 'called to be his holy people'. Is this just Paul saying the same thing twice for emphasis? No. It's much more than that. It's also more than Paul saying we are called to be holy, both individually & as a community. The word translated 'sanctified' here actually means simply: 'to be present - **placed** in Christ Jesus'... As followers of Jesus, we are both fully cleansed by being 'in Christ', but also called together to walk with Jesus & grow in holiness. Being a holy people is an eternal, spiritual truth about what God has done for us in Christ. It is also something, both individually & together we are always being called into – a daily experience. Alleluia !

2) Paul makes it clear. This experience is for the Christians in Corinth – and also for anyone who calls on the name of Jesus. This new life in Christ Jesus is for everyone, everywhere, for all time. For us, now, in Hemel Hempstead. Alleluia!

3) 'Grace & peace' is how Paul greets the Christians in Corinth. And in every letter he ever wrote. The order of this greeting is important. Once we experience God's grace, we will know God's peace... Do you know peace ? Do

you have peace in your heart right now ? If so, it's most likely because you know that God loves you. Jesus has proved this. If you don't know the peace of God right now, it might be that you don't know that God loves you. Today, here at Carey, you can discover this truth for yourself, if you haven't already. I encourage you to speak with me, or someone you know to be a Christian after this service. God wants you to know peace, a peace which passes understanding... God offers this peace to us - today & every day.

4) Fourthly from Paul's introduction, there is this. The Christians in Corinth are told, reminded that: '... in Christ, you have been enriched in every way'. This is also true for us. As our Anniversary service reminded us last week, we have an incredibly rich spiritual inheritance. God in Christ has given us a language & a knowledge of this world which sees beyond all things. Is truly mind-boggling & mind-blowing... Too often, as Christians, we seem content to dabble in the shallows of Christian truth, when God is ever calling us deeper.

5) Fifthly (if I can say such a word!)... Paul tells his Corinthians friends - **& he tells us:** 'you do not lack any spiritual gift, as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.' I don't know whether you have realised this. But right here, Carey together has all God's spiritual gifts. We might not have recognised all of them – in ourselves & others... But God has already given our church **all** the spiritual gifts in God's rainbow array of gifts – in Jesus, by the HS.

6) Sixthly & finally, in talking about 1 Corinthians, there's this assurance. Paul tells the church in Corinth... Paul tells Carey BC in Hemel... 'Our LORD Jesus will keep you firm to the end... because our God is faithful'. Our God has called us and is calling us into fellowship with his Son, Jesus. We are not just servants, but we are friends of God. We have a special place in God's heart. PTL!

So here's the basis of our mission to Hemel Hempstead. The firmest of foundations. The most exciting & bewildering of possibilities. And now I want us to look at what Paul wrote in Romans 8. This chapter is in the very centre of this letter. And yet churches have tended to focus on the last half of the chapter, because of its triumphant theme of victory over suffering. But not so much on this earlier section. About creation subject to frustration. All creation groaning. Like a woman in labour. About believers groaning in prayer too. It's a pretty bewildering part of Paul's corpus.

This struggle is intrinsic to all Christian mission. We are... 'in the world, but not of it'. If you like, one foot on the earth, the other in the Kingdom of God. A very uncomfortable position to inhabit. But it does mean, that like Jesus, we can never turn our back on this world & simply hope for a new world. The Jesus we follow is a 'down-to-earth' Messiah. A cosmic Christ, who made all things, who seeks to re-make all things. So, Carey being an EcoChurch is one vital aspect of our mission, which we dare not overlook. For us to be 'good news' people to this generation, we must be taking climate chaos seriously. We must be intentional about what it means to be careful stewards of this planet. God's earth. Our physical home, (and dare I say) our future spiritual home too...

I love the new song we sung earlier: 'You are worthy of it all'. I heard it first at the Minister's Conference earlier this month. But I do have an issue with it, as I mentioned to some of my fellow ministers. The song mentions 'all the saints & angels' bowing before God's throne, from the vision of the new Jerusalem in Revelation. So far, so good. The song also mentions the 'elders' bowing before God. Great!. But, there is a big 'but' here. Nowhere does the song mention 'the living creatures' who are clearly also there in this vision in Revelation. This is not just a detail. It is also a sign of the way in which modern worship songs tend to overlook God's good creation. Our songs tend to be very human-centred & heaven-focussed. This is despite the fact that Revelation clearly locates the new Jerusalem as being on the earth.

As followers of Jesus, our thinking about our planet needs to be 'transformed'. We need a more wholistic vision of God's purposes for God's church - within God's creation. We are not simply waiting to be taken away from this world. It seems clear to me that 'the new heavenly age' somehow still involves this earth. So, every day, as God's holy people, we are called to partner with our Saviour in renewing God's good creation. We do this in anticipation of what God will ultimately do through Christ, who is making all things new. This is also our holy calling, as co-heirs with Christ - to make all things new.

One thing you might consider doing, in the next week, perhaps, is this. Your obedience to Christ, might involve one simple action. How about writing to your MP? Our new MP, David Taylor. You might have already done this. But if not, you might simply want to send him a greeting, wishing him all the best in his challenging new job, and saying that we will be praying for him.

I confess, I have already written to our MP. Partly to congratulate him – if that’s the right word. In many ways being an MP is an unenviable job! So, I have also assured him of our prayers & we will be praying for our new MP shortly. But the other reason I contacted Mr Taylor was this. We live in one of the most nature-depleted countries in Europe. We are not ‘enriched in every way’, as God wants us to be, when it comes to our environment. So, I invited David Taylor to support the new ‘Climate & Nature Bill’, which is currently before Parliament. This important piece of science-based legislation is due for its 2nd reading on 24 January. Sounds like a long way away. But before next year, its vital there is a groundswell of Parliamentary support for this Bill. Over 180 MPs are already supporting the Bill, but more support is still needed, including from our MP. This is just one way we can express Carey’s mission calling as an EcoChurch in the coming days... By getting behind this potential new law, and by encouraging our MP to do the same.

You can find out more about the details of this Bill, by contacting our local Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, or any number of other environmental organisations. Their websites are up on our screen now, along with our MP’s contact details.

(SCREEN) – (I have hard copies of these details, which I will hand out later)

Also onscreen are some details of the charity ‘Hope for the Future’, which supports individuals & organisations - inc. churches - in contacting their MP, on all sorts of issues, including creation stewardship matters. ‘Zero Hour’ is another group which helps voting citizens become campaigning citizens, specifically about climate change & nature loss.

If you need a template of the kind of letter you could write to your MP, I could send one to anyone interested. Important to say that it is good to personalise your letter, to make reading all these letters more engaging for our MP !

Let me finish by again quoting Paul & by sharing a video about the ‘Climate and Nature Bill’.

Paul writes: ‘... we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose’. What an incredible comfort & reassurance in this troubled & troubling world!. However, if you still are not at peace about our world, about your life, God wants you to know his peace today. So, please speak with me, or someone else who follows Jesus, after the service. And I, and others, will pray with you to know God’s peace.

We also know God's peace by acting in obedience to God. God's first command to Adam was to 'care for the earth'. So here's a video, presented by a new MP, Dr Roz Savage. She lives in the Cotswolds (?) and she is the one who 1st presented the Climate & Nature Bill as a Private Members Bill, earlier this month. She is an impressive environmental champion to inspire us (VIDEO)...