

2 Cor 5:6-10 14-17-19

Last time I stood here to preach I preached about Jesus meeting Nicodemus. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. He told him that God's Holy Spirit moves among people bringing new life and convincing them of the truth of God. He told him the astounding message that God loved the world so much that he sent his only son into the world to save the world. In this letter written by St Paul, it is as though he has taken these words from John's gospel and gone deeper into their meaning. Paul sees our life as Christians as being like being a new creation. We are re-created for life in God's Kingdom.

So Paul starts in vv 6-8 by wondering whether he would prefer to be alive in this world or taken to be with God in heaven. Here, we are in our earthly life but unable to see God face to face and at the moment we are still tainted by sin and pain. Paul seems to be undecided because although he would rather be in heaven where God is, at the moment there is a life for him to lead here. There is a world to tell about Jesus, there is a brokenness that needs to be healed. Those of us who have experienced the new birth, who have been recreated, are walking through this earthly life by faith in Jesus rather than by sight of him; although we might prefer to be walking with Jesus in the heavenly places without having to face the traumas of this life. One day we will see him face to face. We need to be grounded and active in this fallen world. To quote an old corny phrase, 'There is no point in being so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good'. God calls us to be active on his behalf and Paul reminds us that there will be a judgement day when our life here on earth will be examined. Jesus will see us as we really are without any mask or hiddenness.

Put it another way. Imagine a Venn diagram. One circle is life here on earth and one circle is life where God is in heaven. these circles overlap where God's Holy spirit is at work in the world; They overlap in those times when we know that God is speaking to us perhaps through our prayers, our worship or our study of the Bible or through other people saying things and we know that God is really at work performing a miracle and making himself known to us. we know he is there because of our faith. As Paul says we walk by faith and not by sight, one step at a time when we are in that overlap. And there are times when we are really conscious of the presence of God. The more we trust God's call on us and obey his will for us, the more we become aware of his goodness and love and the more we are living in the overlap. One day those 2 overlapping circles will be one circle. One day we will be where God is, totally

in his presence. Or another way of thinking is that in the new heaven and earth that is talked about in the book of Revelation, will only be one place. But it will be a holy place because that is where God is and God is holy and sin-free. We will only be there because we have received the new birth through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Because we have been born again, because we are people who are being re-created, we have a totally new outlook on life. We see the world differently. When Paul talks about 'The World' he uses it as shorthand for saying the whole planet, but in particular the broken people of the planet who need God and are ignorant of his love, and who can be quite antagonistic to him. Because we have discovered the immense love of God we are *compelled*, he says, in verse 14, to go to those who need to know about God and share that love with them. Compelled is a strong word. We are compelled because Jesus died for everyone, not just us. People are going about, wrecking their lives because they are ignorant of Jesus. They do not know that God loves them. The Gospel is for everyone and it is a tragedy that they do not know about Jesus.

You might ask why after 2000 years do we still have people who are totally ignorant about Jesus. But the fact is that each generation has to hear the good news for itself. Each person has to be told. Even in families where faith is encouraged it is not genetically inherited. Each generation needs to respond afresh to God's love. That compulsion to evangelise seems to have faded in some quarters perhaps because it is not easy in a world where it is OK for everyone to hold their own views on something and nothing can be said to be either right or wrong absolutely. Yet there are many people who are longing to know more about Jesus and want to be loved. Many people have very strange views about the Christian faith. Recently on TV I heard someone say something about the Bible being a scary book, and someone else say that God hates her because of something she did. This is so sad and wrong. There are many people who cannot see any way out of the life they are living. Yet the good news of the Bible is that change is not only possible but it is inevitable when we commit ourselves to God and place ourselves in his hands. We are a new creation. The Holy Spirit, God's presence within us, begins a work of change in our lives.

God is achieving this change in us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through his death he dealt with the sin and self-centredness in our lives. When we turn to him, admitting our need of him and put our trust in him we can

have a relationship with God. This is how we were made to be; we become the people God intended us to be, the real me. This reconciliation with God is something everyone needs.

St Paul knew how much change was possible. Before he was born again, re-created, became a Christian, (whatever title you like to give him), he had been persecuting the followers of Jesus. But God turned him around completely. Paul knew that there was no-one who was outside the love of God. no-one had ever been so bad they could not be forgiven and no one was ever good enough to earn the right to be a friend of God. All of us depend entirely on the grace of God his love and mercy which he demonstrated to us in Jesus' death on the cross. Paul felt that if God had shown him mercy and forgiveness then there was no-one who could not be changed by God's Holy Spirit.

Loving Father, we thank you that change is possible. Send your Holy spirit into our lives to change us into the people you want us to be. Help us to live confidently in the overlap, trusting you and obeying your will for our lives. And Lord if there is anyone here who does not yet know you please speak to them so they hear your words today. Amen.

Questions for homegroups. Read 2 Cor 5:6-10 14-17-19

1. V10 tells us that we will all be judged. What does that mean for how we live now?
2. V 7. 'We live by faith and not by sight'. How does this work out in our day by day lives?
3. What does it mean to 'see no-one from a worldly point of view?'
4. Do you feel like a new person since finding faith?
5. V18-19 The people who have responded to God's love and are being re-created, are now the means by which other people may come to faith. What is your personal role in this ministry?
6. Chose a verse or phrase that speaks to you from this passage and share it with your group. Commit it to memory.