**Galatians 2.1-21 (Fellowship)**

(Wednesday 20th May 2020)

A number of years ago we went on the Diocesan pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. A huge bunch of us went - including two bishops. The weather was awful, and one can argue that the story that has led to that place being such a centre of pilgrimage is historically more than a bit dodgy, yet the experience was very special. It boiled down to the **quality of fellowship** - first that among our group, but also when we celebrated communion in the church itself.

It was absolutely jammed, it was standing room only, and one had to identify the station from which to receive communion by heading towards the nearest golf umbrella! Very weird but a very special fellowship! We were very much all one!

That was certainly not what was now happening among the Christians in Galatia. A serious division was occurring and that was between the Jews who had become Christians and those who were Gentiles - Jewish Christians were now insisting that Gentile Christians must embrace the Jewish faith - i.e. become **ONE OF US**.

Paul gives a huge shout of NO!!! to these Judaizers. In Galatians you will find Paul at his most agitated (*look at 3.1 “****You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?”****)*

The key parts of the Jewish practices at issue were the ones that separated them from others - i.e. circumcision and table fellowship. Even Peter was beginning to fall into that camp as was Paul’s missionary companion, Barnabas.

Our reading today contains Paul’s central argument. He identifies with his fellow Jews as he presents the central basis of the Christian faith ***- “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in (of) Jesus Christ”***

The Jews saw themselves as accepted by God - God’s chosen people - because of the Covenant he had made with them. Keeping the Law (“works of the law”) was very much a kind of badge of their covenant membership. In particular keeping those parts of the law that made them distinctive.

But now all has changed - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has changed all that. He had opened up a door for all to enter into that fellowship with God - Jew and Gentile together. To follow the path that the “Judaizers” were advocating would be a huge step backwards ***“if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing”*** (2.21)

So, you can see why Paul is getting so worked up. The heart of the Christian faith is threatened by the Judaizers. Christianity was to him in danger of becoming another sect within Judaism.

But it is the culmination of God’s whole plan for the salvation of his whole creation. His creation that was trying to operate independently of its creator.

Paul saw clearly that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection was the culmination of the plan that God began when he called Abraham - “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing … and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” Genesis 12,2-3).

It was in Jesus that all the families were now being blessed. God’s plan was completed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - it was time to move on with that plan. To revert back to the old would be a disaster.

But how does that impact on us today? The implementation of that plan has arrived with us. WE are now very much a part of it. How do you think we are doing? I wonder what Paul would say to us?

**Prayers**

(just a few thoughts!)

* Let’s remember those who are suffering from Covid infections at this time and also those who are close to them.
* Pray for those recently bereaved.
* Pray for folk who are finding this “lockdown” so difficult to handle and for those who are worrying and trying to care for them.
* Let’s remember those known to each of us who are suffering from other chronic ailments and who are finding it difficult to get their normal care and support.
* Please pray for the teams who are working towards finding a therapy and a vaccine.
* Continue to hold in your prayers those in the NHS who are very much the “front line”: and for their families who must worry about them.
* Pray for those we know who are not well at this time
* Remember our government leaders and the scientists who advise them.