***Readings, reflection and prayers for Wednesday 6th May 2020***

***Read the Psalm of the Day***Psalm 119 vv105-112

**Introduction to Sermon Series**

Today we begin a series on St Paul’s letter to the Galatians

**Background**

In 1955 in the London diocese newly ordained curates as part of their Post-Ordination training had to study Galatians in Greek. The result of this was that quite a number of churches in the London diocese had Lent courses conducted by their newly ordained curate on Galatians. As a 15 year old new Christian I went to my local church and had one of my earliest Bible Studies and this opened up to me one of Paul’s most significant letters. Along with the letter to the Philippians I would say that these are the 2 letters that are the best introduction to Paul.

There are two points of background to Galatians that are important for us to understand.

**Abraham**: God’s initial promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:4) is that **all** peoples on the earth would be blessed through him. A further promise (covenant) is made to Abraham (Genesis 17) that, through his son Isaac, he would be the father of a great nation and the sign of this covenant was that all males were to be circumcised. A further obligation came 430 years later when God Gave the law to Moses (Exodus 19-24) for the Israelites to obey.

**The** **Acts** **of** **the** **Apostles** (Chapters 9-15) cover some 15 years from the conversion of Paul to the Council of Jerusalem. After his conversion Paul’s commission from the Lord to go to the Gentiles is revealed to Ananias (9:15).

In Chapters 10 and 11, we read the dramatic account of the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile, and a Roman soldier. Peter had a dream about food – impure and unclean according to the law- he then sees this as a sign that the Gentiles can become Christians and full members of the church.

In Chapters 13 and 14, we read of Paul’s first missionary journey which includes visits to Lystra and Derbe in the province of Galatia (in today’s Turkey).

Chapter 15 is the account of the Council of Jerusalem. Gentiles had not been fully accepted into membership of the church by some. Many Jewish Christians were demanding that they be circumcised and obey the Mosaic law. They heard what God had done amongst the Gentiles and listened to Paul and Barnabas. The conclusion of the council was that the Gentiles could become full members of the church without being circumcised or obey the mosaic law but they should abstain from “food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.”

We do not know when Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians and there are difficulties (but not impossible) at reconciling the chronology of Acts with Galatians 2. It is possible that this could have been written either just before or just after the Council of Jerusalem, thus making it the earliest of Paul’s letters in the New Testament or it was written much later. In understanding the letter it doesn’t make much difference when it was written.

***Read the Bible reading of the day****:* **Galatians 1:1-10**

This is the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

***Reflection***

There was a huge problem in the Galatian churches. A group of Jewish Christians were demanding that Gentile Christians be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. They were refusing to have proper fellowship with the Gentiles. Paul sees this as a fundamental denial of the gospel and goes right at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There are a few points that I particularly note in these first 10 verses.

Paul emphasises that he is called by God, and not by man, to be an apostle. This is the God who raised Jesus from the dead, and who in Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age.

Paul’s words about what has happened in the Galatian churches are very strong – “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting” … “there is no different gospel”…”those who preach a different gospel are condemned” (in Greek – anathema)

Paul could have written a different letter (more tactful?) but he feels that this would have been pleasing men and not God.

**Postscript**

This problem continued in the church though with reduced form well into the 2nd Century. If Paul had not taken this stand that Gentiles were welcome unconditionally, the church might not have grown in the way that it did.

As many of us have time on our hands why not read this letter to the Galatians and the letter to the Philippians. Let Paul’s words speak to you. Don’t worry about not understanding Paul – he can be difficult at times (c.f.2 Peter 3:16). If you want to discuss anything do feel free to ring me on 01442 872725 or email jvmkirkby@aol.com.

***Collect for last Sunday – 4th Sunday of Easter***

Risen Christ

Faithful shepherd of your Father’s sheep

Teach us to hear your voice

And to follow your command

That all people may be gathered into one flesh

To the glory of God the Father***. Amen.***

***Prayers***

Some thoughts about topics for prayer are:-

* Those who are ill
* All in the medical and caring professions
* For research especially those looking for a vaccine
* All who are isolated
* Those who are caring especially in care homes
* For the Christian Church
* Throughout the world
* Our national church leaders
* Sunnyside Church
* For our government, for guidance over the next step
* The bereaved
* All who face uncertain future in business & charities etc.