

Colossians 3:1 to 11 New way of life 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

This morning I'm going to talk about St Paul's letter to the Colossians, who lived in Colossae, now situated in modern Turkey; and we are told in chapter 1 verse 1, that he was with Timothy his brother in Christ.

St Paul had never been to Colossae, the area had been evangelised by others, but St Paul had heard that the church, while faithful in many ways, was going astray through the influence of people who were teaching heresy rather than the true gospel.

In chapter 2 verse 8 Paul writes, "Make sure that no one takes you captive through deception." In other words, stick to the gospel you have been taught by the apostles.

In verse 18 Paul wrote, "Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels." In other words, hold fast to Christ and his teaching."

In the first two chapters of St Paul's letter we find the theology of what it is to be a Christian and in chapter 3 we find the practical way to live out our faith; St Paul not only knew the theory he also knew how to put it into practice.

And it is in chapter 3, read this morning, that St Paul asks the Colossians to seek the things that are above, where Christ is and can be found, and not to drift away from the new way of life that they are now being taught by heretics.

And the title of this sermon this morning is, "A new way of life." And we pick up the letter at Chapter 3 verse 1.

For the Jews of Colossae this new way of life meant living by faith and not by works, and for the Gentiles it meant worshipping the one true God and not idols made by man.

For the Jews and for the Gentiles this was a huge leap; for the Jews it meant 2,000 years of history being put aside and embracing a new way of thinking about God through a new covenant.

For the Gentiles much depended on what, if anything, they believed in before, and clearly for some, in both camps, this step was proving difficult.

In this country archaeologists are finding that the Vikings, who were traditionally thought to have tried to kill everything in sight when they arrived here, in fact very soon started to trade with native Britons, and quite soon embraced Christianity, which had already come here; for the Vikings, this was indeed a new way of life.

So let us look at the first part of verse 1 which reads, "So if you have been raised with Christ."

We know that Christ died and rose again to eternal life, and St Paul is saying that in Baptism the Christian dies to the life controlled by sin and rises to eternal life with Christ, and as such we are a new creation.

My eldest grandson was recently baptised by full immersion at 14, and it is easier to envisage his old self dyeing and his new self rising to a new way of life as he emerged out of the water; a concept difficult to envisage in infant baptism where there's little if any life beforehand, and where it is normal just to wet the forehead.

There are many verses in the Bible that remind us that we are made new in Christ Jesus when we accept him into our lives as Lord and Saviour.

In Romans chapter 6 verse 4 for example St Paul wrote, "We were therefore buried through him in baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

And in verse 5 Paul writes, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

In baptism we are made new as believers in Christ, and are continually being made new when we focus on Christ in thought word and deed.

And in Christ, no longer is everything we do just for our own good, no longer do we put ourselves first.

I recently preached on the Good Samaritan who put an injured man before his own interests, possibly at great inconvenience and cost to himself; that's what it means to live a new way of life.

In this new way of life we don't want to seek the things which should now be dead to us, but to seek the things of heaven that we have inherited through baptism, which, as St Paul wrote are things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Some days can feel like a struggle. We get weary in the many battles we are involved in day by day, we can get stuck in tough places, or feel the pressures of life both at work and at home.

And though it's true that we can never fully escape all the mess this world may bring our way, because we have to live in this world, we can choose to rise above it in the way we live out our lives.

And right in the midst of whatever we face, we can remain steadfast, strong, and faithful to Christ.

Not because we are strong in ourselves necessarily, but because we have the support of the Holy Spirit continually supporting, guiding and advising us.

Thomas A Kempis wrote in the 13th century these words, "It is vanity therefore to seek riches that shall perish and put one's hope in them."

“It is vanity also to aspire to honours and to raise oneself to high estate. It is vanity to follow the lust of the flesh and to desire that for which later there must be grievous punishment.”

“It is vanity to hope for long life, and take little thought for a good life. It is vanity to attend only to the present life, and not look forward to the things to come.”

“It is vanity to love that which passes with all speed away, and not to be hastening to where endless joy abides.”

Thomas urges us to rise above seeking money, honour and pleasures that eventually we will regret, because these things he says are just vanity.

Verse 3 reads, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

St Paul wrote to the Galatians on the things that we are to avoid as baptised Christians, which are; sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and to the Colossians he adds malice, slander and abusive language from your mouth.”

But we, who are baptised into the new way of life in Christ live by the fruits of the Spirit, which St Paul names to the Galatians as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control; these are the things above which St Paul asks us to set our minds on.

In verse 4 St Paul tells us that if we keep focussed on the things above then when Christ appears in glory we will appear with him.

Surely this is a goal that we cannot, must not, through weakness of character abandon through moments of selfish pleasure. No, let us remain steadfast in our faith no matter what trials we meet day by day.

In verse 5 St Paul urges us to put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature, because it's through those earthly desires that the wrath of God is coming.

Now we hear a lot about the wrath of God in the Old Testament, because the Jews lived under the law, and of course breaking the law brought punishment, as indeed it still does, and punishment for the Jews is the wrath of God.

But we live by faith and consequently we don't hear much about the wrath of God, and if we aren't careful we can start to believe that there isn't such a thing, especially when we are told that God is invite love and forgives all our sins.

But we need to remember that forgiveness is preceded by repentance, and where there is no repentance there is no forgiveness, and where there is no forgiveness, there is the wrath of God.

The Jews had responsibilities under the law to keep the law, and we have responsibilities under faith.

At verse 9 we are urged not to lie to each other, and too that we can add the joy of giving rather than taking, forgiving rather than avenging, because we have been stripped of our old self with its earthly practices.

St Paul in his letter to the Romans in chapter 8 verse 13 wrote, “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” And he adds, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

Verse 10 says, and clothe yourselves with the new life, which will bring us closer to the image of God; for which we strive day by day.

Finally in this new life, no matter who we are, we are all brothers in Christ, and as such we are all equal before God.

As we sit let us pray.

Father God, you are both the light and the guide to those who put their trust in you. Grant us in all our doubts and uncertainties the grace to ask what you would have us do; that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Amen