

A sermon preached by Emma Hodge at St. Michael and All Angels' Church Sandhurst on Sunday 22nd January 2017 (Evensong).

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and Redeemer.

Tonight we are in the middle of the week of prayer for Christian Unity¹ and one aspect of this year's week is marking the 500th anniversary of an event which had unplanned ripples across Europe.

The event I am talking about is Martin Luther pinning his document “95 Theses²” to a church door in Germany which provided the impetus for the reformation.

Martin Luther wanted change in the Roman Catholic Church, he objected to some of their teaching which was occurring at that time. Specifically the selling of Indulgences to forgive people's sins so that they would spend less time in Purgatory. Martin Luther objected to these teachings as there was no biblical basis for them. Martin Luther also wanted more importance placed on individuals believing as it is only when people believe, they will then be saved through God's grace and receive eternal life.

While the Roman Catholic Church did change, there were unplanned consequences as well, one of which was that a new denomination of Christianity emerged, Protestantism, of which, in some ways, the Church of England is part of. However Martin Luther never intended to start Protestantism.

This was one of the unplanned ripples of Martin Luther's bold action to stand up for what he believed in, against the culture of the church, but was based on a belief that the Bible is the basis for all teaching, and that people needed to believe in order to receive eternal life.

In our New Testament reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we hear a summary of eternal life as well as his most comprehensive statement about Jesus' death and resurrection and what it means for all of us, and in some ways it is summed up in just two verses.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ compels us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

¹⁵ And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

¹ <https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2017/>

² <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>

These few words are characteristic of Paul’s writing, in a few words, not only has he summed up that Jesus died and rose again so that we may have life, but he also includes the reason that we need to share our faith with others.

Let us spend a couple of minutes looking in more detail about these two verses

In the opening words of these verses, Paul reminds us that it is the love of Christ that holds together our belief that Jesus died for us so that we may be saved, however he goes further, Paul explains why we want to share the gospel with others, through both words and actions, it is because our love of Christ compels us to do just that.

Love is not always logical, it does not always make sense but by having that love for Christ then we are compelled to act.

It is love that makes us put Jesus message into action, to tell others about Jesus, to have the courage, to stand up for what we believe whatever the risks. Just like Martin Luther did when he pinned his document to a church door 500 years ago. Martin Luther acted out of his love for Christ.

It is this love for Christ which continues to compel many people to take risks, to stand up for what they believe and to change their lives in a variety of ways.

Paul moves on to give us a short statement that Jesus died for everyone, however in the phrasing Paul uses, he poses us a question and a challenge, do we believe that Jesus died for everyone?

If we believe that Jesus died for everyone, then there is a challenge in Paul’s words, the challenge is that if we believe that Jesus died for all of us, then surely we have a duty out of the love that we have for Christ to ensure that everyone knows that Jesus died for them?

While Jesus did die for everyone, this does not mean that everyone receives eternal life it is only when we believe and follow Jesus that we receive eternal life. This is the compelling reason why we, and by we I mean every Christian, needs to tell others about Jesus

Paul then moves onto reminds us that Jesus died so that we do not die for our sinful lives, instead Jesus sacrificed himself for us and in doing so, he removed all necessary obligations for sacrifices for our lives full of sin, where we have turned away from God and chosen to live our lives according to our rules and wishes and not His.

As Jesus has paid the ultimate price and died once of us and we are now dead to sin, this means that we have new life, and we are only free to live our lives because Jesus paid the ultimate price and we are compelled by Jesus love to live our lives he gave us by obeying and following his teaching as well as submitting to God’s word by living a life free from sin.

Living a life free from sin is a not always as straightforward as it seems and exploring this aspect would take longer than I have now!

St. Paul in these verses wants us to understand that we are reconciled to God through Jesus death and resurrection.

Paul ends these two verses by reminding us that Jesus is not dead, he is alive because he rose again and in being alive, he provides proof that death is not the end, that there is eternal life and all who believe can be saved and receive the gift of eternal life.

Recently we have been exploring being a mission shaped church which has been looking at why and how we should spread the news to others,

In our New Testament reading, St. Paul sums up a key aspect of our gospel, that if we believe Jesus died and rose again and follow Jesus' teaching in our lives, then we are saved through God's grace.

I started this sermon by looking at Martin Luther, who was a good example of being mission focussed. One of the reasons he wanted change was to put more emphasis on individual faith in the role of salvation, he was mission focussed. Martin Luther wanted to ensure that everyone heard the message so that they could be saved.

Martin Luther took actions to stand up for what he believed in as he knew people had to believe, it wasn't just enough for them to attend church each week, they had to believe in their hearts, but the actions that he took had unplanned ripples.

The Reformation had many ripples and while it changed European history, it also caused division, yet one aspect of the reformation was the unifying belief that everyone needs to hear the message about Jesus and it is up to every Christian to use the opportunities that each one of us has to tell others about Jesus in their unique ways.

If you think that telling others about Jesus is hard, about living a Christian life, just think how your parents or Grandparents told you about Jesus, and could you do the same to your children or grandchildren?

Let us pray Lord help us to have the courage to stand up for what we believe and to tell others about Jesus. ***Amen***