

Sermon Sunday 28th February 2021

Philippians 3:12 – 21 and Matthew 6: 19-21

It was a cold, wet Saturday afternoon; I was playing rugby on a very muddy pitch and the opposition only needed a point to win and there was ten minutes left. We were defending our line pushing them back, scrummaging and kicking for touch. The referee said that the scrum would be the final play of the game, we won the scrum and our scrum half kicked the ball a long way up the pitch. One of our backs took off like a rocket gathered the ball and ran over their line scoring a try. We had persevered in the mud and rain and won that game by two points.

When I looked at the reading from Pauls letter to the Philippians, Paul I felt was telling them to persevere in their Christian faith until the day they meet their and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Paul, we heard from Jenny last week led, as far as he was concerned, a moral upright life, that was until he met Jesus. Those life changing events when he met Jesus changed Pauls life and he put his past life behind him and started a new life with Jesus. He has not found spiritual perfection, he is still persevering and pressing on. In 1 Corinthians 4 verse 8 Paul tells the Corinthians that they have not found spiritual perfection in a comfortable earthly life, it is a constant way of life leading ultimately to God through Jesus.

Paul tells the Philippians in verses 12 and 13 **‘NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED ALL THIS, OR HAVE BEEN MADE PERFECT, BUT I PRESS ON TO TAKE HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH CHRIST JESUS TOOK HOLD OF ME. BROTHERS I DO NOT CONSIDER YET TO HAVE TAKEN HOLD OF IT. BUT**

ONE THING I DO; FORGETTING WHAT IS BEHIND AND STRAINING TOWARDS WHAT IS AHEAD.'

Paul says his aim or goal is to be like Christ and to be everything Christ has in mind for him. This example is one for all of us in our lives; we should always focus on our goal, knowing Christ, a quest which was likened to an athlete in training by Paul in this Letter. This goal or gift from God has to be used daily in our lives because a gift given that is never used might as well never have been given. There are many people who do not know God and there are many Christians who profess to know God and Christ. Jenny reminded us last week that reading the Bible, going to Church may not be enough though when we meet God after our earthly life. 'Once saved, always saved' is not a motto to live by as a Christian; yes, we are saved when we turn to Christ but that is only the beginning. We must continue to develop our faith and our continuing relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is what Paul is telling the Philippians, using himself as an example.

Continuing faith means we accept knowledge of Christ, as Paul acknowledges in his letter, and how we must continue to seek or find that knowledge. This can be likened to a walk, a walk of friendship and obedience to God, lasting all our lives. As long as the relationship or walk continues, salvation is assured. However, once that relationship is broken and fails it no longer has any effect on our lives as Christians; we have failed and salvation denied. However, we can always acknowledge when we have failed and make our confession to God and seek forgiveness. We know that our God is a loving God, always there and He will forgive and put us back on the walk with Him provided of course we mean our confession and take steps to build our faith and relationship.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians is stressing this developing relationship in his own life and our own lives being something to be nurtured and grown. **IN VERSE 14 PAUL WRITES ABOUT ‘PRESSING ON TOWARDS THE GOAL TO WIN THE PRIZE FOR WHICH GOD HAS CALLED ME HEAVENWARDS IN CHRIST JESUS.’** The Greek here for ‘heavenward’ can be translated as ‘an upward call of God.’ However, the prize is the same – salvation.

But it is quite clear, Gods call upwards encompasses all of life. Rest assured things will change on our walk or relationship with God, as I know from personal experience. Many times, I have had to stop and seek Gods help to enable me to put aside my human thoughts and actions and seek Gods way. It is not easy, who said being a Christian would ever be easy; this however is part of my Christian or faith development and my life. **Paul tells the Philippians in verse 15 ‘ALL OF US WHO ARE MATURE SHOULD TAKE SUCH A VIEW OF THINGS AND IF ON SOME POINT YOU THINK DIFFERENTLY, THAT TOO GOD WILL MAKE CLEAR TO YOU.’** The word ‘mature’ here is not a reference to age, it means our maturity as a Christian and that maturity, as Paul tells us, must grow and develop. As I said before I have sought Gods help in difficult times and He has made clear my way forward. This I believe is the maturity Paul writes about and no matter what our human age, child or adult, we can all mature in faith by following Gods way.

It is common in our society today not to refer to death, there are many who lead their lives in the here and now and doubtless this may include many Christians, but ultimately all die. However, our faith has a purpose and direction as we live our lives and mature in faith because it looks beyond death itself to a life of eternity and salvation.

To finish, a quote from Marcus Maxwell 'Few people could live life more fiercely and purposefully than Paul. Yet he did so because he knew that, in the end, his life was a preparation for eternity.' An example and way to follow for us all.

Let us pray, a short Celtic Prayer to finish. God the Lord has opened a door Christ of hope, Door of joy! Son of Mary, hasten Thou to help me; in me, Lord Christ, let there be joy. Amen.