

## HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Date: Sunday 14 June 2015

Reading: 2 Cor 5:6-17

Theme: Home and Away

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Language is a funny thing isn't it? Wicked, sick, deep ... many other words don't necessarily mean what they seem to say. There are other words that we introduce into our everyday speech that seem to come from nowhere ... "like" and "so". Every time you are asked a question the reply begins with So ... where did that come from, I wonder?

Chapter 5 and verse 6: So ... not meaningless, it's full of meaning.

Looks back to beginning of the chapter

Tents and buildings vv1-4

Temporary structures and permanent dwellings

Our body, he says, is a temporary thing, God is preparing a permanent building, he is building for eternity.

Once this life is over, there is something solid, stable, welcoming to come. Eternal in the heavens.

God has prepared us for this ... v5

And has given us the Spirit as a guarantee v5

So we are always confident v6 ... confident in God the Father and in God the HS. Our future is secure in him.

When you are young you don't think about these things too much ... but as you get older ... they come more and more onto your radar. Friends become ill, you visit them in hospital, you may go to their funerals. But even for teenagers, there are those who suffer from life-threatening illnesses in their school-days. Life can sometimes be really obviously a very fragile thing. And Paul's picture of tents and buildings is a good way of thinking about that.

Our confidence is in him in this life (the tent) and in the life to come (the building).

With that in the background let's move on ...to our passage for this evening.

### Four key phrases ...

- Walk by faith not by sight/home or away v7, v9
- Appear before the judgement seat v10
- Those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart v12
- If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation ... everything has become new! v18

## **Walk by faith not by sight/home or away v7, v9**

Another way of describing the reality of the tension between the tent and the building. Faith and sight/ home and away. In this life we walk by faith. We walk by trusting the God we can't see.

And some people think Christians are bonkers because there is nothing to show for it ... how can they possibly believe in a God they can't see, touch or feel?

Two responses to that challenge:

- a. Evidence
- b. Experience

### **Evidence**

As many of you know, Kathryn and I used to be lawyers – she worked as one for 20 years, I studied to be one but never took up a job. I did however work for three months with a criminal solicitor when I left school.

Magistrates Court, Durham Prison, Police Cells in the city centre in Hull, Thorpe Arch Remand Centre near Wetherby and Armley Jail in Leeds.

As a rookie 18yr old, just out of school, I often went on my own, I met with prisoners and took statements from them in an evidence book.

Eventually they would come to court and to trial and the evidence we had taken would be critically important.

Evidence for the existence of God is principally found in a book, an evidence book if you like. We call it the Bible. It's the story of Gods' love for the world, a story of our rebellion against him and a story of his rescue plan to send his Son who would live, die and be raised again for us.

There are other pointers: the created world, the complexity and the wonder of maths and science, the beauty of words and poetry, the arts and music. These are pointers to there being something beyond, something beyond there being just a pile of chemicals and the weirdest accident.

Evidence says that there is enough there for us to believe and trust in this God who is making himself known to us in lots of different ways and principally through his Son, Jesus Christ.

### **Experience**

Worship and prayer and healing and miracle are also ways in which we get to have a sense that there might be a God, something or someone more than this present day to day reality. For those of us who get caught up in singing or in silent worship in the presence of God, we may not be able to see him, but we know he is there.

When we pray he answers. When we pray things happen. When we pray, someone said, more coincidences start to

happen. We may not be able to see him, but we know he is there.

When we pray for healing and see it or we are healed ourselves, we find that sometimes there is no medical explanation. Xrays look different. Tumours disappear. Legs get longer. Pain disappears. These things do happen. We may not be able to see him, but we know he is there.

Experience says that there is enough there for us to believe and trust in this God who is making himself known to us in lots of different ways and principally through his Son, Jesus Christ.

This experience added to the evidence we have mentioned should give us confidence that we are not bonkers, that we are relying on solid foundations, standing on solid ground, able to believe and trust for very good reasons.

We walk by faith not by sight .... but that faith is built on something very stable and very reliable and very robust. Evidence and experience, which we as Christians claim, makes the best sense of the world around us.

### **Appear before the judgement seat v10**

One of my favourite hymns is Amazing Grace! I love that sense that it was written by someone caught up in the slave trade. Someone who was discovered by God and found hope and healing in him. And he wrote about that

life-changing encounter in the words that he was blind but now could see.

And this is at the very heart of what the Christian faith says: that we didn't love God, he first loved us; that he sent his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life; that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

There is something very clear about the Christian faith which is different from any other world religion ... we don't need to do anything to earn our way to God, to earn our salvation, to persuade God that we are in some way good enough for him to accept us.

In his Son, Jesus, God reaches down and touches us at our point of need and makes us whole, makes us his and welcomes us home. That's amazing grace.

But that's not to say that we can then do what we like and it doesn't matter. That's not to say that we can live our lives as if God didn't exist, that we can ignore him, be unkind to others and display extraordinary selfishness and behave really badly. It doesn't mean that because one day we will appear before the judgement seat of Christ. One day we will have to give account for how we have lived and what we have done and said and thought. And we will receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

This is tent-life. What we do in the tent matters. Who we are in the tent matters. How we are with other people when we're in the tent matters ... and one day the video tapes will play and Jesus will have something to say about what he is looking at on the film of our life. And that's a bit scary ... our salvation is safe and secure. We are found in him and confident about that permanent building ... but good, honest, faithful tent-life matters. This is called sanctification – God by his Spirit making us more like Jesus, more holy with each passing day.

### **Those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart v12**

This is where it gets complicated ... because I have been saying that tent-life matters. What people see of our life matters ... but that's not all, because sometimes what people see on the outside and what's really going on on the inside are two different things. Jesus calls people who are like this this wolves in sheep's clothing.

So although tent-life is important, if tent-life doesn't match up with heart-life, we have got a problem. And heart-life trumps tent-life every time as far as Jesus is concerned. They are supposed to be the same. With Jesus what you saw was what you got, and for his followers, for you and for me, it's supposed to be the same. But we all know that that this not always the case.

So this is complicated and it's also tricky because Paul is saying that he wants people to notice what they're like. Tent-life does matter. But he wants the tent-life and the heart-life to match up. And sometimes they do and sometimes they don't.

If our heart is shaped by Jesus, if our character is formed by the Spirit, if our identity is found as children of God our heavenly Father, then the chances are that our heart-life will overflow into a matching tent-life. But we know there are temptations and there are challenges along the way which might mean we get out of kilter and our ot synch.

It's at times like that that we may need to be ruthless with ourselves – or have an accountability buddy who will tell it as it is about us – so that we get back online and back on track. It's not the end of the world - these times happen. We just need to recognise what's going on and take steps to correct it.

Boasting in outward appearance is not good news. Boasting in a heart that is surrendered to God and that leads to behaviour which honours Jesus is very good news indeed.

And finally ...

**If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation ... everything has become new! v18**

Of all people to write about this, Paul is your man. As we know from our reading of the NT, Jesus called people ... the 12 disciples, a motley crowd of men and within that group he had three special friends Peter, James and John. Jesus called a man named Saul who was renamed Paul. Originally a learned and educated Jew, Paul wanted to attack, imprison or kill those who called themselves Christian. But he heard Christ call him and his life completely changed.

Paul knew first-hand what it meant to be made new. When you become a Christian everything just looks and feels different. I can remember when I first became alive as a Christian when I was at university. I went on holiday with my family ... and I just knew something was different. I was looking at the world through different eyes: eyes of faith, eyes of love, eyes of hope. And there were some real differences in my family, in myself, in how I looked at everything and everyone.

So when you become a Christian everything looks and feels different. But also when you become a Christian everything about you is different. There is a new creation. Everything has become new. Not all at once maybe – fruit takes time to grow. Our character takes time to be worked on by the Spirit gently and intentionally. Day by day, little by little we are being changed to be more like Jesus. But we are changed, we are different, we are a new creation from the moment we say yes to Jesus.

And although we may struggle from time to time, although we may muck up and mess up from time to time, there is no going back. We are on a new trajectory. We are heading in a different direction. We know that we will one day move from our tent to that building being prepared for us – eternal in the heavens. And although it may not be yet, and although there is lots to do now and immediately and where we are, it will be a great day when it comes, that day when we can put our tent down and move into our permanent home.

Let's pray ...