

Revd. Simon Lewis

Sunday 11 July  
Theme: Trinity 6

## *Isolation Radio Talk*

**An Ambassador in chains; One cloth woven of the same fabric; You may do as you will, as for us, we will live as God's people.**

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Good morning Listener.

These days the daily post is generally quite dull; a mixture of bills to be paid; exhortations to buy this or that on-line, all to be delivered. This week I read a cheerful, sometimes breath-taking letter. It is hard to believe that it began its journey from a prison cell. A few lines from that letter will be read today in churches in England; it is the letter to the new Christian Church in Ephesus (a Greek city then, now in present-day Turkey) written from a dungeon in Rome. Bitterly cold in winter; insufferably hot in summer. In those conditions you do not mince words; the Apostle Paul writes from the heart.

St Paul is asking a lot; he wants us to live together despite all our human differences; he prays for just that. Ephesus is not a city at ease with itself; it is difficult to live as a Christian in Ephesus; Luke, in his book the Acts of the Apostles, says that Ephesus is an idolatrous city; yet here is this ambassador praying that Christians there may grow into the fullness of God himself.

An Ambassador? That is how Paul describes himself in this letter (Ephesians 6.20), an Ambassador in chains. He is writing, as a Jew, mostly to those who are not Jews; he knows only too well, as we do also, how difficult it is for people of different backgrounds to live in peace together. He urges them to understand that God will break down those barriers. He knows that it will take patience, humility, and gentleness. Listen to Paul's words: "For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2.14).

St Paul had his own difficulties; he had to establish his credentials as some people continued to question his integrity; sometimes even, he questions it himself. Perhaps he could not believe his own good fortune. He knew by what right he speaks; by the grace of God, given, not earned.

He stakes his claim to be an Ambassador. He had encountered Christ on the road to Damascus; he made a special point of meeting Peter in Jerusalem to understand the origins of the Gospel. He had been set aside by the laying on of hands by the church at Antioch to carry the Christian Gospel to the Gentile world. He testified to the seal of approval stamped on the Churches he had founded. Now, he says, he is a prisoner, but still an Ambassador; a prisoner precisely because of the Gospel he preached; imprisoned by those who hated what they heard.

When you hear the story today, do not doubt that those to whom he was physically chained, as well as the rota of Roman guards, were aware of the name of Christ; do not doubt this prisoner, in that dungeon, did not cease to make the case for Christ to all of them. I like the phrase '*Ambassador for Christ.*' An ambassador is no fanatic or crank. An ambassador thinks through and carefully calculates what is best for that which he represents. That really was Paul; a strong personality and a great mind.

What does he pray for, so elegantly, so powerfully? Because nothing is impossible for God, he prays for great things. If there are Christians in places of power or in places where they are powerless can others bring them before God? Will you be such a person? He prays for such energy, that you may be strong. Our Lord longs for Christians of energy, for energy is always arresting. You who are baptised Christians, are named *ambassadors* for him; you must uphold others in prayer. Paul prays, you will be rooted in the love of Christ; there can be no other way and in such a way.

Through prayer, you will be open to God, and your hope, is that you will 'dwell in him and he in you' (part of a prayer in the Book of Common Prayer). I know that is not easy for many and it is all very well for another person to say that this is how it ought to be; the Christian life is experienced, it cannot be lived through someone else. That is why *worship* is the principal calling of Christians. There are some who will wish to deny this; they say the gospel imperative is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, relieve debt; that misunderstands worship; and is a trap to paralyse the church. It divides the church between those who regard the Gospel as spiritual and those who regard it as political or social. Some become concerned with worship some with social justice.

There can be *no* such division; the Gospel is one cloth woven of the same fabric. It is to say that what God is doing within you and among us, and what God is doing in the world, are finally the same thing. Both recall you to the same questions? Whom do you love most? Where is your security rooted? To whom or what is your loyalty given? Who are you? These, are all worship questions. They are also political questions. They all concern faith - your relationship with God - and your answer will reveal you.

What Christians must understand is the imperative to keep alive their Christian identity in the world of today. For that, worship is essential. Whatever else happens you will remember, along with St Paul, that you are God's people. You must do things that remind you, recall for you, retell for yourself and for others, the journey, the history, the tradition, of God's relationship with God's people and what God has done on your behalf.

The early Christians understood this well enough; I am less certain about today's Christians. The Christians of the Church of Peter and of Paul knew their very survival depended on the clarity of their identity with God and with God's purposes for them. Because their identity was secure in their Lord God, they were a people who could say, 'you may do as you will, as for us, we will live as God's people.'

Now, on your day, when you pray, continue to pray for great things.

Thank you for listening

## **Prayer**

Let us pray

Almighty God, I am praying for great things:  
give me grace to address you with my heart,  
as well as my lips.

You are everywhere present,  
from you no secret can be hidden.

Teach me to fix my thoughts on you  
reverently and with love,  
so my prayers are not in vain.

Amen.