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Sermon

Encouragement for the Journey

Colossians 2:6-15, Genesis 18:20-32

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“The West Wing” TV series is one of my favourites. In one scene the Chief of staff is asking two financial advisors their forecast for the next year. One says everything is going to be great, the other says that everything is going to be bad.

The Chief of Staff responds with, “One of you is going to look very foolish in a year’s time!”

Looking into the future is a task fraught with difficulties. Describing the present is safer but still not easy. Over the past few weeks, I have listened with interest as three Christian speakers have given their understanding of what is going on in our world, our Nation, and in the Church now.

All were quite clear that while the present is, to say the least, challenging yet there is plenty of reason for hope.

One speaker, an historian, told of the many times the Church has faced devastating difficulties yet has survived. He told of ways in which apparently insignificant things have led to amazing outcomes beyond anything the people of the time could imagine.

A small group of twenty people, eventually called the Clapham Sect by others, were able to make huge changes in the face of incredible opposition. The most famous of these is William Wilberforce who eventually succeeded in abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.

In the NZ office of the Church Missionary Society there is a teapot that is said to be the one used at the meetings which set up CMS. From small beginnings at some tea party’s great things happen. Thousands if not millions have heard the Gospel through the work of CMS.

One speaker talked of seeds that have very tiny beginnings yet grow to amazing size. Do not therefore despise the day of small things. We have no idea what will happen because of our work for the Kingdom of God. We can rely on God to do great things or small through us provided we are faithful to the Lord who called us into His Kingdom.

So what are we called, small or great, to do now? St Paul faced this with the Church at Colossae. There was some kind of false teaching beginning to influence the young Church and when Paul hears of it, he writes to encourage them to hold on to the things they have been taught and the manner of life that is pleasing to God.

We start at the beginning of chapter 2 where Paul shares how deeply committed to the Colossians and to the other churches that will receive his letter. (Verse 1)

He aims to encourage them deep within their heart and that they will be united in love for each other. Because only as we learn to understanding what this new kind of love that the death and resurrection of Jesus has shown us will we have the ability to grasp the full riches of understanding of God's ways. (See Ephesians 3: 18). Without this love we are blind to who God is and what His purposes are.

As we go through this difficult time let's make our aim the same.

For as with St Paul's audience so with ours. There are many false teachers around. There is much nonsense being shared on the internet. "I tell you this," says St Paul, "so that no one may deceive you." We must learn our Faith so that we are equipped to deal with false BUT PLAUSABLE information.

St Peter in his first letter supplies two key attitudes will give us the skill to meet the threat of false teaching. They are gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3: 15.) That is the way we are to treat others. Be careful around those who do not treat you in the same way.

In verse 6 Paul lays down a principle that will shape the whole of your Christian life or mar it forever in its absence. "So just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, strengthened in the Faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

There are four things here that St Paul wants to tell us in this verse.

1. **Continue to live the way you began.**
2. **Cultivate deep roots as you grow in Him**
3. **Strengthen the Faith you were taught at the beginning.**

I am constantly surprised that members of the Church know so little about their Faith. It is not enough to come here on Sunday or listen at home and think that will be sufficient. It is a good START, but it is not enough by itself. It can't be.

I have a file box full of notes and books from courses I have done on sailing. I am still a very ignorant amateur. I know how to sail a boat from A to B and could safely anywhere in the Hauraki Gulf. But what I DON'T know could fill a library. So, I keep learning.

Could you see your way clear to spending some of your time on learning your Faith?

May I suggest 5-7minutes each day reading the Bible. Start with St Mark's Gospel. A good commentary helps.

There are also daily Bible reading booklets available through the Church office that would fit in to that kind of time slot. They are available online and on your cell phone as well.

But all that Paul is saying is under one proviso: Is Jesus the Christ LORD of your life. Not one more thing added in as an important aspect of your life, BUT the controlling person in your life. Life lived under His direction.

4. Live a life of thanksgiving. As you grow in your knowledge of, and living for Jesus, you will find yourself giving thanks for all that God has done and is doing for you.

This is the way to handle times of uncertainty and change like the one we are going through now. No matter what the world throws at us, no matter how dire the circumstances are, we know that there is a god looking after us. It will not remove the grief or the fear but it will strengthen us to go through it knowing that even though we don't understand we can be assured that there is a benevolent hand guiding us through.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

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