

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 14th July 2019

Text: Colossians 1:1-14

There are some people who you just know they are in the room: loud voice, a gathering crowd, you certainly know their name, and maybe you may find yourself feeling a sense of excitement or the indeed the opposite, a bit of eye rolling, depending on whether they are to your taste. They are “on stage” and everyone knows it

There are other people whose presence is just as tangible but not by a loud, visible presence. They are people who enable things to happen, enable other people to shine and bring their best,

They are not on stage, often work behind the scene so that resources are available, others can do what they do best and shine, there is a sense of purpose, collaboration.

I became aware of this the other evening while watching a BBC programme about the Apollo 11 mission to the moon 50 years ago: can you name the crew of three – Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and... Michael Collins

Everyone remembers Armstrong and Aldrin who were on the stage, walked on the moon while Collins stayed behind in the orbiting module: monitoring, communicating, you could say enabling -

In our NT reading we see this same sort of thing – Paul greets the church in Colossae thanking God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, speaking of the Father’s will and the Son’s work of redemption

But buried away at the end of v8 is reference to the one who opens our eyes, makes real to us the love of the Father and work of the Son, who takes knowing about these truths and turns it into knowing of, relationship with

For this is the work of the Holy Spirit – the quiet, shy member of the Trinity, who shines the spot light onto Father and Son, to direct our gaze and awaken and enliven us to the Father and the access to that relationship made possible through the redeeming work of the Son

Paul’s co-worker Epaphras has reported that these people in Colossae are not just loving, but loving “in the Spirit” (v8)

And if you start to look through the rest of this opening section of Colossians you begin to see other references to evidence of the quiet but vital work Spirit

- how the gospel is “bearing fruit” and “growing” in the whole world
- the same words are used for those believers in Colossae, “bearing fruit” in every good work and “growing” in the knowledge of God (v10)
- believers are “filled” with the knowledge of God’s will (v9) and are also “fully” pleasing Him (v10)
- Paul’s prayer is for them to be made strong with “all” the strength that comes from God (v11)
- and to have an ability to endure “everything” with “patience” and “joy” (v11)
- then in v12 believers are “enabled” to share in all God has for them (v12)

These are all words that speak of overflowing and enabling, that are signs of the work of a Person whose presence is evident not by being stage centre but working behind the scenes

This is all the work of the Holy Spirit, the One who moves us from just love in our own strength, even love that arises from a well-intended sense of obligation or duty, to love in the Spirit –

hallmarked by freedom, being empowered, discovering joy in all circumstances, and that arises from our own experience of the gospel (v5)

One writer says that “this gospel or literally “Good News” is not just another of many things to set before us, another hopeless and daunting task. The gospel is not the message of what God demands, but of what God offers. It does not tell of God’s demand from (us) but God’s gifts to us.” (W Barclay, p128)

And it’s the Holy Spirit who awakens us to the offer of this gift and who connects us with it

The Holy Spirit has been working in this way since the very beginning of time:

The Spirit is the power at creation, bringing light from darkness, order from chaos, forming all things, crafting beauty and amazing intricacy and fruitfulness

Then throughout the OT the Spirit comes on particular people for particular tasks at particular times – prophets and judges, craftsmen and Kings

Into the New Testament it’s the Spirit who overshadows Mary and incarnates Jesus, empowering Him to live the Kingdom in all its costly but life-giving power

And then promise of Jesus is fulfilled at Pentecost as the Spirit comes to live in all believers as a permanent empowering presence

All of this is caught in those four short words, this “love in the Spirit”: enabling a living love towards God and towards others

In v4 we read about the all-important combination of faith in Christ Jesus and a love for others

And then, how the work of the Spirit is to take these things and actually enable them to happen in the lives of ordinary people like you and me

READ v9b-10

See how it not just knowing God’s will but then actually doing it

So often we do know how we ought to live but can lack the will and the power to turn good intentions into good actions

But now, through the Spirit, this becomes possible

Over the next couple of weeks we are going to explore more about who is the Holy Spirit and what the Spirit comes to do in our lives as individuals and as a church

But for now, I want to end with simply praying for us the same prayer Paul prayed for the church in Colossae

Allow it to soak in to you, to begin to create in you a desire for the gift of these things to become more and more real in your life, our life together

You could close your eyes and listen

You might read along in your Bible

But either way, I invite you to become open afresh to the behind-the-scenes Holy Spirit who longs to work in you and in us afresh

READ Col 1:9-14 (precede with “... love in the Spirit.”