

Sunday 11 June 2023
Holy Trinity – Holy Communion (8.00am)
1st after Trinity

Genesis 12:1-9

Romans 4:13-25

Matthew 9:9-13 & 18-26

I was thinking about our second reading this morning and the way the Apostle Paul talks about faith. He wrote getting on for nearly half of all the books in the New Testament and I got to wondering what sort of man he was.

I say he wrote all those books, but the fact is that most of them were actually written down by a secretary, a scribe who followed Paul's dictation.

So, who better to ask about Paul than Paul's secretary, his scribe. I wondered what he would say about Paul and I imagine the conversation might have gone something like this...

It was a great honour to work for Paul. Of course, at the beginning I had no idea how important he was going to be. Although, even in the early days you could tell he was special, someone to watch.

He had such energy, he was always talking and thinking. It was quite hard keeping up with him sometimes and he had a definite tendency to have such complicated sentences and phrases.

I hear now that his churches kept his letters, and still read them over and over again.

I was a volunteer, of course, because I am proud of my writing skills but also because, in a way, I owe my belief in the Lord Jesus to Paul and his missionary skills. He didn't have to bother, but he fought hard for Gentiles like me to be included with all the others.

I had hoped to get to know him better, working with him, but he was an incredibly hard man to know. I still, to this day, don't understand why he gave up his home and family and his Jewish tradition to join a bunch of Christians.

Going round with him to all those strange places, I heard loads of stories about Jesus. The ones I liked best are the ones where Jesus goes out of his way to help all those folk who the so called respectable people wouldn't touch with a bargepole. Paul said Jesus used to eat with collaborators and prostitutes and would even touch lepers and unclean women.

It's easy to understand why those sort of people would want to follow Jesus. Or those people who came to him for healing after everything else had failed. There was this amazing story about how Jesus cured this little girl when everyone else said that she was dead. And her father was a leader of a synagogue, a respectable man, just like Paul used to be. But, then again, that father was desperate.

Not to mention the woman suffering from haemorrhages. That was so against normal Jewish culture but Jesus didn't care.

So, I can see why people who had nothing to lose would try Jesus. After all, if you're already an outcast, or if the person you love most is dying, why wouldn't you risk it.

But Paul wasn't like that though. He was really well educated, born and brought up a proper Jew. In fact, he had spent a lot of energy getting all the right Jewish qualifications. As well as all that, he had a respectable trade and a good reputation.

He told me that, when he first heard about these new Christians, followers of Jesus, he really hated them. They were completely undermining everything he had worked for, he said. He even went so far as to actively persecute them, even to the point of having some put to death. As a result, they were very suspicious of him when he first came to believe - hardly surprising really. In fact, I think some of them are still not quite sure about him.

So what made Paul turn everything around, give up his family and his comfortable life and start travelling all over the world preaching about Jesus? I wonder about that a lot because he often got beaten up or chucked out of town, but he never gave up. It's a good job he didn't because now the faith is spreading all over the world, very much thanks to him and his helpers.

He was one of life's deep thinkers of course. He would spend ages thinking about how his old Judaism and his new Christianity fitted together.

I remember copying out passages about Abraham, and about how what's special about Abraham is that he trusted God. He went on about how Abraham thought God wasn't like one of the old gods - you know, the sort that you had to put up with their whims or the sort who only cared if you'd done as you were told.

No, faith is what Paul kept going on about. Nobody can keep the law, he used to say, however hard they might try. But anyone can get to know God and trust him just like Abraham did. This was Paul all over - it was so important to him.

Of course, if everything they say about Jesus is true, then there's a perfect reason to trust, because Jesus' resurrection means life for all of us.

But, what if it's not true - I asked Paul this once. I thought he would be furious with me but he just smiled and said that he knew, better than anyone, except for the eleven, because he had actually met the Risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and it had changed his life for ever. He said that he hadn't realised just how desperate he had become. He thought his life was going along just fine the way it used to be. But when he met Jesus, he knew that anything apart from Jesus, anything outside of Jesus, wasn't really life at all...

Well, I suppose the conversation could have gone something like that.

The more I have studied Paul and his writings, the more I realise that Paul probably wasn't the easiest person to be with. But his inspiration has survived for two thousand years, so he definitely had something going for him.

I have also come to the conclusion that Paul's scribe could well have made a pretty good missionary himself. So, what about all of us today? If aspiring to be like Paul is too big an ask, and it probably is, there's no reason why we can't be like his scribe - definitely an example to us all, perhaps.

Amen.