

SERMON – 23 JULY 2020 – Colossians 2, Luke 11



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Paul is writing to the church in Colossae. Colossae is in modern day Turkey. It seems as if this church was formed early on in the history of the Church, Paul visited it early on in his ministry, and he writes to a group of people he knows.

“Brothers and sisters, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

There’s a lot in that sentence, “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord” – first and foremost we are Christians, we worship Jesus Christ, we have received Christ Jesus the Lord. Some people have a very definite knowledge of when that happened – I was converted on such and such a date, in such and such a place, there was a moment, a point, when I accepted Jesus as my Lord and my Saviour. John Wesley wrote about his heart being strangely warmed, when the faith he had always been part of, became real and deep and he knew Jesus as a person, as his Lord. I am not one of those people who can give a date, a time, a place. I was always part of a church, I always knew the stories, I always felt I knew Jesus.



Barton Baptist Church

I was brought up as a Baptist, and in that church we don’t baptise babies. Baptism should be a personal, adult response. I was 16 when I wanted to make that personal adult response. I know I was baptised on 5 November, that’s not a date you easily forget, and I think it was 1979, but I’m not entirely sure. My relationship remains real and strong, but it has gone through some very difficult

times – and, along with the faith of the church, relationship and faith have kept me going. To me, the two have always gone together – Jesus the person, Jesus my Lord, and the church, my fellow Christian people, the people with whom I journey. You can't have one without the other!

Like all friendships, it needs time and energy to be given to it to get a real depth of friendship. I have many friends who are only really Christmas card contacts, and we all know how many people only have a relationship with Christ and his church at Christmas. I have some friendships that always start with an apology because I haven't been in touch, and I'm not alone that all too often I find myself apologising to Jesus that I haven't been in touch. But I have some friendships that are deep, long-lasting, require effort from me, and effort from my friend.



Cambridge University Railway Club visit

to Cadeby Light Railway in 1983 – Jeremy is the chap standing at the back

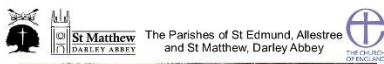
The phone will go at 10 o'clock tonight and it will be my friend Jeremy – we have been friends since Cambridge University Railway Club days, I am Godfather to his son, he is Godfather to my daughter, we chat to each other every week on the phone – in the darkest times of my life, he made the effort to phone every day, and often drove across the country with his wife Sue to be there and help. At the moment Sue is going through cancer treatment, so we're trying to be there for them – and many of you know how hard that is. Friends like them are rare, friends like them are special – friends like them reflect the friendship of Jesus for me, and I am eternally grateful. I'm sure many of us have friends like that. Can I talk about my friendship with Jesus in the same glowing terms – and if I can't, why not?

“Continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” – but how often does faith, worship, prayer, all the basics of our Christian life become a struggle, how often do we give up, drift away, because we all have so much else to do. It's like everything else. If I want a beautiful garden, I have to make time to work in it.



If I want to use the cheap ticket East Midlands Trains are offering me for a day in London, I have to find a free day, and persuade the boss I can escape (I have offered her a trip to the new station at Barking Riverside, but she doesn't seem too keen!). If the friendship with my children matters, I have got to find time to go and see them – and if that means I need to be away from work, what's most important? They are. It's the same with our Christian faith. Make time to pray, make time to worship. If you can't come at 10 on a Sunday morning because the family are staying – can you come in the evening, or watch us on youtube, or come on a Wednesday morning, or pop into the Cathedral for one of their services, they have worship daily... Friendship needs to be worked at, our relationship with Christ needs effort – and if we don't put any effort in, is it any wonder our faith goes cold?

We moan about people outside church, all these baptism families we rarely see again, and I often think we are moaning about them because it is easier to point the finger at them, than take a look at ourselves, and our faith, and our commitment.



The family of the Reverend Arthur and Mrs Florence Surr in the Rectory garden at Uphill, Somerset, 1901 (your Vicar is probably older than him)

Vicarage (Birthday) Tea Party Sunday 7 August

You are welcome for afternoon tea, any time after 2 pm. Please bring a plate of sandwiches/savoury or a plate of cake to share together. Tea and soft drinks will be provided. We'll put a donation pot out and any profits will go to the British Heart Foundation - donations can also be made via <https://www.justgiving.com/page/peter-barham-1657831757435>
Come and join us and help me be cheerful as I enter my 61st year.

One of the things about a church like us is that we seek to be friends with so many – and that takes effort. I will enjoy an afternoon with our families today, I will enjoy a Vicarage Tea Party with (hopefully) all of you in a fortnight –

but yesterday afternoon I threw a strop about never having a free Sunday afternoon to go and chase steam trains, and no doubt in fortnight's time I shall ask my wife whose daft idea it was to invite everyone for tea. It was a real privilege to do three funerals last week, to celebrate lives well lived – but it's hard, especially when it was Cecil, and I knew him and had worshipped with him, and I was mourning too. We all have a list of phone calls we need to make, people in our churches we try and keep in touch with – and that list has got longer over the last year. It is hard work, it is also dispiriting when you phone and they say “I haven't heard from you for ages”, it's always my fault!



Julie and I had a day in Lincoln on Friday. That was an effort – whichever way you go, the road to Lincoln is extremely slow. It's always bitter-sweet going to Lincoln, as we lived there with three young children and there are many things that remind us of Gareth. It's bitter-sweet as the Theological College is closed, sold off and rebuilt as luxury flats. The chapel in which I worshipped daily is now a very nice apartment, big security gates and a sign that says “beware of the dog.” The welcoming, homely college, place of students and families, of a chapel, library and bar – a place of friendship, laughter and learning – now barred and locked, full of individuals, no community. A handful of the friends we are still in touch with, many you remember when you see their retirement notice in the Church Times, and some have died.



We went into the Cathedral, which is very special. We worshipped there as a college, we worshipped there as a family. I remember one Community meeting where there was a bit of a row because the children in the Sunday School had been eating the biscuits that had been left out for post-service coffee. I did

point out that if they left chocolate biscuits out on a plate, the three year old Gareth couldn't resist. I couldn't deny it, because the previous Sunday, when they all came in to join us at communion, Gareth had chocolate all round his mouth, and a biscuit in each hand!



We went to Solemn Choral Evensong on the Feast of St Mary Magdalene. An excellent choir visiting from America, and incense every where – a real treat. Interestingly the congregation was about the same as it was when we were there regularly 30 years ago – a mixture of choir hangers-on, earnest youngsters, and many in their latter years. Now assuming that most of the old people who worshipped thirty years ago are now worshipping on another shore and in a greater light, there is a new generation discovering the joy of Choral Evensong, now part of the worshipping community.

“Just as you were taught” writes St Paul, and we have all been taught by wonderful people. However, have we stopped learning. 10 minutes of Christian teaching a week, and that assumes you come to church weekly, and that my sermons count as teaching We should do better, but when we try and get people together, we don't get much take-up, so that discourages me, so we don't try, and we're easily in a circle where we are all ignorant, and stay ignorant. Can we do better?



I cheer myself up by those final few words – “abounding in thanksgiving.” Every relationship needs thanks – remembering to thank my best friend and tell her I love her (I only put that line in because she’s here this morning rather than taking the service at St Matthew’s).



The Lord’s Prayer, in our Luke reading - “Father”, a relationship with God, the Almighty God, a relationship where I can call the Supreme Being ‘Father’, where the relationship with our parents, our children, can be a reflection of our relationship with God – there is a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging, a sense of certainty that can root us even in this week of politics gone mad. “Hallowed be your name.” Sanctified, made holy, greatly venerated. Then a relationship with God that gets down to our basic needs – “give us each day our daily bread”. “What’s for dinner?” says my wife, and I provide it – God is there for us.

“Forgive us our sins”, because we are sinners, none of us are perfect, all of us do what is evil, and we can be forgiven. “Forgive everyone indebted to us” – don’t bear a grudge, don’t seek revenge, forgive, move on, know freedom – and all the good things that come from the peace of God. “Do not bring us to the time of trial” – life is hard, God be with, strengthen us – and gives us the friends we need, help us help each other.



We have faith, we are blessed. God has faith in us, love for us – and we journey in the power of the Spirit. By the next Sunday I'm here, I will be another year older, but (as I've said before) being Vicar of Allestree makes you feel young! We kneel together, we share bread and wine, we take Christ into ourselves – we journey in the power of the Spirit, into a new week, with all sorts of new challenges, and lovely people to journey with. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Peter Barham
23 July 2022