Reflection for 4th October 2020

For my reflection today I want to concentrate on St Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

I find this part of the Epistle a real testament to the depth of faith that Paul had. He had everything to be thankful for, born a Hebrew, and Zealous as a Pharisee, confident of his own righteousness under the law. He was successful and had the establishment’s support in his task as a persecutor of the Church until that day when the Lord appeared to him and changed his life forever. Now here we see him, having suffered enormously for the sake of the Church he once tried to destroy and yet not a hint of sadness or regret. Here Paul unequivocally states that whatever gains he had, he has come to regard them as loss because of Christ. For Paul regards everything he formerly had and was as loss, simply because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

What a powerful statement that is. Paul affirms with all of his heart that it is all for Jesus.

When I was a young curate, this was the favourite passage of scripture for my training incumbent. The words he favoured were:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

He and I and countless others within the Christian Fellowship really identified with this phrase. For it speaks with the conviction of St Paul in that he wants to know Christ. This is not just saying that he wants to have a casual encounter, no this is far more. Here what is being sort is an intimate knowledge of our Saviour. I want to know Christ means that we want to know him fully, down to the last drop of his precious blood. For my Incumbent this was a real and positive conviction that was re-ignited within him every time he celebrated at the Eucharist. It was at the very moment of consecration that he felt fully aware of our Lord and the power of the presence of his blood served to remind him of the prize which awaited him and all who are faithful and true to Jesus. For with the full knowledge of Jesus in our hearts we discover the power of his Resurrection.

When we build up a strong faith in Jesus and set our minds on knowing him as fully as we are able, we open up for ourselves the reality of a life lived within the power of the resurrection of Jesus. This power like the total conviction of St. Paul enables us to walk through the valley of death into a life which transcends that death for all eternity. In knowing Jesus fully we live and move and have our being within the reality of his resurrected life. Resurrection is not something which awaits us after death it is a living reality, but in order to engage with it we must die to self and live for Jesus. This is the depth of knowing Christ which was the marker for my Training Incumbent’s ministry. As long as he held Jesus before him, as long as he like St. Paul counted everything else as loss, he was convinced that his life would be blessed by the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

I have remembered that commitment and his love of that phrase throughout my own ministry. It has always been a guiding hand whenever I may have doubted or been unsure of what I was doing and where my life was heading. I guess many of us will remember something which has been imparted to us from a wise person from the past.

Think back on who has inspired you, of a few words which always come to mind when things are uncertain or dark. Comfort comes to us through that which is familiar, but there is more to faith than just familiarity. In order to know Jesus we must love him as he loves us, and in order to feel the power of his resurrection, we have to abandon our lives and live them fully for him. St. Paul shows us the way. St Paul may not always have been a perfected member of Christs Church and yes he started from a very difficult place. Yet what this really reveals to us is that Jesus uses even the most unlikely people in order to promote the Gospel of Peace and Justice to the world.

If Jesus can open his heart to Paul and open his Spirit to the reality of the resurrection, then he can do the same for us.

All we have to do is to follow the example of Paul and my training Incumbent. All we have to do is remember those few words: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. In Philippians Paul did not feel that he had quite reached his goal, and this too is key, for in yearning to grow closer to Jesus his faith and ours simply gets stronger and stronger, so strong that we can face anything because we know the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

So be strong in the faith, look to Jesus, and may your lives be richly blessed as you feel within you the power of his resurrection.

Thanks be to God.

Reverend Clive