



Christ Church News (15)

by and for the Christ Church Family
14th June 2020 - 2nd Sunday after Pentecost



Reflections on the Early Church in Europe

This is a good time to reflect on the development of the early Church, and our own aspirations at Christ Church, as we look forward to welcoming the Rev'd Helen Higgin-Botham and her husband, Colin.

I would like us to focus on the story of the early Church in Europe (Acts 16: 9 -40). You may recall that it was Paul's second missionary journey and he had a vision to go to Macedonia (Northern Greece), and arrived in Philippi, a colony of the Roman empire. Paul, as a Jewish convert to Christianity, always headed for the synagogues to share the good news about Jesus. Jewish law stated that a synagogue could be formed wherever there were ten male heads of households. There were insufficient Jewish men in Philippi, so prayers took place outside by a river.

Paul and his companions found a group of women praying. They sat down and joined them, which, given the segregation and inferior social status of women, is noteworthy. Amongst the women was Lydia from Thyatira, who lived in Philippi. She was a gentile and proselyte to Judaism - a highly successful business woman trading in the valuable commodity of purple cloth. When Paul spoke of Jesus she listened with an open mind and heart and chose to be baptised. Lydia declared her faith and offered hospitality to Paul and his companions in her household. Paul and Silas were subsequently beaten and imprisoned by the authorities, but an earthquake came and released them from their bondage. Their prison guard became a Christian as his life was spared as Paul and Silas did not try to escape from their cell. On their release they returned to Lydia's house prior to travelling on.

Lydia was the first Christian convert in Europe, and a leader in the first Church planted in Europe. She was seen as a model for ethical business practice and provided resources to support the Church. Like me, you may be surprised that a gentile woman was the first Christian in Europe, as, throughout the centuries, the Church has reflected a patriarchal structure to varying degrees depending on the Church's tradition.

But when we think about this story, what does it tell us about God's nature and his plan? As a Church we are committed to the Whole-Life Discipleship Programme of the Southern Synod of the URC with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. So, when we engage with others on our frontlines it seems that Lydia's story is important, as evidence of how inclusive God is. It's the stories we tell that often capture people's imaginations and allow them to re-evaluate what they once believed.

This couple of verses from Vicky Beeching and Matt West's song say it simply – we all belong and are loved, and no one is worth less, as that is not the way in the kingdom of God:

*Come if you are joyful happy laughing
With a song spilling out of your soul
Come if you are broken and all that you know is
Your life is spinning out of control*

*Millions of voices just one song
Come to the place we belong*

Gill Constable



*Do you have something to interest, inform, inspire or amuse? Share it with us!
Send it to the editor at chichristchurch@googlemail.com*

Word for Today Acts 11 vv 19-26

Reflection

I went out to investigate what was going on amongst the gentiles, whether the rumours we'd heard about the gospel being preached to them were true. When I arrived, I could tell straight away that God was at work - his Spirit moving in a wonderful way. You should have seen it - day after day more people coming to faith, a constant flow of people joyfully committing their lives to Christ. It was a revelation to me.

Like my fellow apostles I had never looked beyond my own people until then. I could see the evidence of God's work with my own eyes - the transformation of people's lives, the joy, the peace, the love, the power and I knew, then, the message of Christ was for the many, not just the few. The glad tidings were for everyone everywhere. A world was out there waiting to respond, hungry and thirsty, and for too long we had deprived them of the opportunity to hear the message. We had the gospel of salvation and we'd hidden it away like some closely guarded secret.

Don't make the mistake we did - looking inward rather than out. Rejoice in what Christ has done; yes! Celebrate his love for you, but then, please, whatever else, don't keep it to yourselves.

Prayer

Eternal God,

for all our claims to be a pilgrim people the fact is we are often anything but.

We like what is well-known, trusted and familiar, and we find change hard to deal with, resenting anything which jogs us out of our comfortable routine.

Far from encouraging new blood and new ideas, we react with hostility and suspicion, even to the point where we keep our faith to ourselves rather than risk outsiders coming in and upsetting the apple cart.

We may not do it consciously, but it is true nonetheless, and the result is to frustrate your will and deny your purpose.

Help us to remember there was a time once when we had no place among your people and that any part we may have in your kingdom now is down to the way you have changed our lives.

So, teach us not to fear change, but to welcome it as an agent of your transforming purpose, which is constantly at work in the world, shaping not just us but all; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Private Prayer in Churches

The Government have announced that churches will be allowed to open from 15th June for private prayer only. Christ Church have set up a risk assessment group which will be carrying out assessments on all aspects of opening our church. **The date for opening for private prayer will be decided by the Trustees following these risk assessments** and careful consideration will be given to what can be reasonably managed using guidance and risk assessment tools developed by the URC and Methodist Church UK. Further information to follow. *Doreen*

What can you access?

....another request from the editor

On behalf of Christ Church Trustees, I am conducting a survey. Please reply to the email sending this newsletter and answer these questions. Thank you to those who have already given me this information.

Do you use the Internet for accessing church services, and/or other Christian resources?

eg websites, Facebook, YouTube

If Christ Church wanted to use live communications, eg Zoom or other, would you be able to access it?

The following was sent to Chichester City Church Leaders
by *Bruno Kondabeka* of the Chichester Family Church

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am certain that the events of the past two weeks in regards to the racial tension in our country, America, and our world has not escaped your attention; I am also uncertain on what you and the church you lead have done so far! As a black man and as a Christian leader in the city of Chichester, where I have enjoyed living for nearly the past 25 years, I thought of writing to you because of the conviction I have that the time has come for us to speak out. The issue of racism has been blighting our world for centuries, not only in the United States of America, but across the world - the United Kingdom included. I know that we can't pretend that it does not exist in Chichester because many of us have experienced it with differing degrees and I, for one, have been turning a blind eye to it for way too long for the sake of peace and quiet. There are some people saying that they understand that 'Black lives matter' but all lives matter; I agree, but, right now, the time has come for us to speak out about black lives and to make it our focus. It doesn't mean that we should not talk about the other injustices, and even condemn the violent protest by a minority of people, but, by so doing, let us not lose sight of the main issue at hand - that black lives matter.

Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr are some of the heroes that we celebrate. Mandela went to prison the year I was born - (yes, I am that old) - and King was shot dead 52 years ago; yet we are still dealing with the same prejudice. I have 3 sons; maybe I could concede that it is a bit too late for my 24 and 21 year old to see real change in their young adults lives, but, for the sake of my 13 year old, my prayer and my longing is that he will be able to walk the streets of Chichester or London and for people not to make assumptions about him and judge him simply because of the colour of his skin. My dream is that Samuel would be afforded the same opportunities given to everyone based on his character and abilities.

There are so many examples in the Bible that tell us that God's kingdom is all inclusive; Revelation ch7: v9 talks about the reflection of heaven which is a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language... I bet in that multitude there are White, Asian, Black and so on. Again, 2 Corinthians ch5: v16-21 talks to us about the ministry of reconciliation - ie the old being gone and us becoming new creations and ambassadors of reconciliation; this is a clear call for us who have been transformed to be agents of transformation.

So, what am I asking of you? Just a few simple and important steps:

1. Take the risk to speak out and get the conversation about racism going in your own home, your church as well as in the wider community; (you have influence in the community).
2. Get informed about this issue by talking to people as well as asking God to guide you through His Word.
3. Encourage those you talk with to develop a relationship with someone of another race - (it is only through relationships that our love can be sustained).
4. Kneel (Pray) and engage your congregation to kneel and ask for God's help because He alone is able to change the heart of mankind (not legislation).

Please know that I am available and happy to chat if any of you would like further conversations about this issue.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email and for your support
as we continue to work together for the kingdom.

Bruno