

All Saints Talk for Sunday 10th November 2024

'Keep on speaking' Tony Haines
Acts 18: 1-17 Mission to Corinth

What a weird week we have all had. I wonder what was your mood on Wednesday morning when you realised that the Donald had won the US election? I was playing golf that morning; the weather was gloomy and so was everyone else's mood around the first tee. Things since then seem to have settled down and most of us are trying to look on the bright side! But we'll see! Anyway things could be a lot worse, as they are for many people and as they have been in the past.

Meanwhile back here at church we continue to follow the movements of Paul in around 50 AD He's finished in Athens and has travelled to Corinth. Journey of 50 miles probably by sea, less than an hour in one of the America's Cup yachts!
MAP

Pretty close but A very different kind of city: Athens full of clever academic, philosophical people , fascinated by ideas, hence Paul was listened to as he spoke about the unknown god; the resurrection of Jesus.

Luke tells us that a few people became followers of the Way. Most folk there liked having their ears tickled with new ideas, but didn't want their lives to be changed.

Corinth was so different; a port, on narrow neck of land between the Adriatic and the Aegean. Probably more mixed socially: Cosmopolitan, Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians, Jews. It was a prosperous city. Common religion was around the goddess of love Aphrodite (from which we get aphrodisiac, to increase libido, sexual pleasure) In Corinth there were 1000's of Temple prostitutes, and the Gk word to 'Corinthianize' meant exactly that: life of debauchery and promiscuity. And if you have read or can remember the emphasis in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth written about 4 years later he wrote very strongly against sexual licence. He tells the members of the church there to flee from sexual immorality. He asks: Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

As we have read it was in Corinth he came across a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, a married couple, who were later to be travellers with Paul, who, with many other Jews had been evicted from Rome on the orders of Emperor Claudius, possibly because of the arguments between Jews and Christians. These two, Aquila and Priscilla had the same trade as Paul. At this stage Paul was a self-supporting evangelist. They were tent makers; it's not clear what material they used, possibly leather of woven goat hair, to provide awnings to cover the entrances of private houses. So it seems they all worked together as a business.

Every Sabbath/ Saturday Paul spoke at the synagogue about how Jesus was the expected Messiah.

But soon in V 5 Once Silas and Timothy arrived to support him in his work Paul devoted himself to preaching.. homes, synagogue, city square? But despite his efforts the Jews in Corinth resisted his message, and after many attempts to bring them round he decided he'd had enough of that, wasting his time on people who were set on refusing the message so he, probably angrily, 'shook out his clothes' : "Your blood be on your heads." An interesting response:, but reminding us of what Jesus had told his followers:" if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet." Paul was a man on a mission and if time after time people rejected the message he wasn't going to waste time fruitlessly arguing with them. I'm off to share this good news with Gentiles, and he went next door!. Yet, the leader of the synagogue did believe, as did his family, and a large number of others who were baptised. So, all was not lost or wasted. We had two wonderful baptisms last Sunday morning not of infants, but of mature men who have recently decided to follow Jesus.

It could be that after such disappointment he would have been deflated, disappointed and depressed. We may have times like that ourselves, knowing that things have not gone well.. But it is often at our lowest moments that God can reach us. Maybe your experience.

Verse 9: It seems that soon after this disappointment, The Lord spoke to Paul in vision. He has already received other visions: Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus which led to his turning to follow Jesus. A little while ago we read that he had a vision of a man calling him to Macedonia. Whether it was more than a strong feeling, or a reminder of God's earlier call on his life, or maybe it was an angel. Luke doesn't say.

But what did this new vision say to Paul: 'Don't be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. I am with you, no one is going to attack or harm you...I have many people in this city.' What a reassuring promise that God gave him. He had this deep sense that whatever the opposition God was still with him and using him. So he stayed on, teaching the word of God.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church he admitted: I did not come to you with eloquence or superior wisdom. My message was not with wise or persuasive words, but a demonstration of the spirit's power. It's as though he went to Corinth lacking real confidence in his ability or his calling. Yet he kept on, encouraged by the experience of that vision, whatever it was.

That's the preamble!

Today's talk is entitled **'Keep on speaking'**.

Tom has given me this subject to talk about probably because he knows that I do struggle to talk to people who never go near the church about my faith.

That's my confession!

I wonder how good you are at speaking about following Jesus? We can all talk, but how good are we at talking about what most matters to us as followers of Jesus?

Some people have the gift of the gab, talk hind leg off a donkey, Irish folk have kissed Blarney stone. Thank goodness most of us don't.

But we are recommended to be prepared 1 Peter 3:15 'to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do it with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience.'

Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity Col4:5

But of course, that begs the question: Do other people know the hope that we have? Do they have any awareness of the joy we have in belonging to Jesus and being part of his Church?

How did you become a Christian? Almost certainly it was because of words spoken to you or read by you.

Paul says in his letter to the church in Rome: 'How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?'

As our culture has changed during my lifetime it has felt more difficult to engage to talk about my faith. Those old certainties have gone, and in the public spaces of media, faith is less assumed, and more regarded as an exception, so it is newsworthy that Ben Earl, England's back row forward finds his faith of comfort and strength. Same with Adam Peaty our top swimmer. Bukayo Saka, Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rashford great footballers. But there is an opportunity in that because we, too, are the exception, followers of Jesus are very much in the minority. and folk may be more interested than we might suppose! Do you feel exceptional? You should because, underneath all the business and activity of life, your friends and families are looking for meaning, hope and direction; what you and I have found to be true, that, as God said to Paul, I am with you....don't be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. I am with you.' God is saying: Share the secret, the pearl of great price.

The truth is that if you follow Jesus you know that God loves you; you are held in that deep sense of security, whether you feel it or not, He lives in you by His Spirit, Paul says you carry around you the aroma of Christ. Not because of the Chanel or other perfume, but people do detect it. Hopefully not because we are negatively prudish and judgemental, but because there is a life in us put there by God.

This is not bigging ourselves up! We actually can only say it in all humility and with huge gratitude. We have done nothing to deserve this sense of being included in God's family.

So, we don't need to be retiring and coy about our faith, but likewise we must not force conversations. A few words dropped into a chat....Just openers to a possible longer conversation.

I felt God saying to me...

An interesting event this Sunday, some people at church were baptised last Sunday. They came to faith through the Alpha Course.

We had a wonderful celebration party at church as the new building as opened..

At my home group we were discussing the Assisted Dying Bill and ...

We are encouraging folk to go to the Forum to hear a former gladiator talking about his faith..

We need to have confidence to simply chat normally about our lives.

Here are a few examples:

There's a member of our church here who was having a chat to a stranger in a café. These two people got talking about their families, and the first person said: I'd love you to meet my church family. So this other person came along and is now a regular and committed member of our church.

From a simple invitation. People just don't know what they're missing.

Someone said:

I started following Jesus aged 17 having never previously been involved in anything churchy or religious. What provoked me to find out was Alison. We were at school together and she was the real deal. There was something about the way she treated people, her kind words and some 'vibe' she carried that begged the question. I began asking and, before long, I received!

What did you do at the weekend? I like Mondays – it's a great time to talk about Jesus! Whether you are in the office, at the school gate, after a lecture, having lunch, people often talk about what they got up to over the weekend. So, what did you do? It probably doesn't happen every weekend (or Sunday), but why not throw into the conversation a story about someone becoming a Jesus follower or a healing miracle or something the speaker said that would make your unbelieving friends think...

Tell your own story. I don't have a dramatic story to tell my friends, but my story is that pratty well all my life I have known and trusted God. I've often done stupid things and gone the wrong way but I've always known that God loves me and He is my deepest security. One of the ways we overcome the dragon – Satan – is by "the word of our testimony" (Revelation 12:12). The story of your conversion is a powerful, foundational tool that you can share with someone. Simply ask them about their own spirituality, listen carefully to what they say and then ask if you have ever shared with them how you became a Jesus follower:

Honest, open, curious. Stories

COSH

C Curious, ask other folk questions, and it may lead to how they see life. It doesn't always happen, but they may ask you the same things!

O Be Open to discuss any topic

S Stories, tell them your story, experience of God! or remind them/ tell them a Jesus story

H Honest, admit if some aspects of your faith are confusing/ contradictory

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We've probably all got stories about saying something small which may start someone to think....

I came across a great sentence the other day. You probably know what John Wesley said about doing good? He said: Do all the good you can by all the means you can , in all the ways you can, in all the places you can , at all the times you can, to all that people you can, as long as ever you can!

But this quote is similar: 'We should share Jesus in as many ways, with as many people, from as many walks of life, as we are given opportunities'

Making the most of every opportunity Eph 5:16

Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity Col4:5

Many of us start our days with praying along with the website: Lectio 365. It ends:

Father help me to live this day to the full, being true to you in every way;

Jesus help me to give myself to others, being kind to everyone I meet;

Spirit, help me to love the lost , proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

So let's keep on speaking. *Amen*