

Tidenham Church 17/7/22

Colossians 1: 15-28 – Focus on Jesus

Prayer

Well, the Vicar's away now for a couple of months. What shall we get up to? Not sure that's the right question – memories of my parents going away for a long weekend and leaving three of us 'responsible teenagers' to take care of the house. We had the party of a lifetime, but didn't quite manage to restore the place to its pristine condition... enough of that story. Last week Vicar David told us to focus on Jesus – as indeed does our reading from Colossians and the one from Luke. Focus on Jesus – who he is and what he has done and what he is doing and what he promises. That's hardly headline grabbing news – preacher tells congregation to focus on Jesus. But that, I hope, is the take-away line from today – focus on Jesus.

But what does that mean? And how do we focus on Jesus? Especially when there are so many distractions around. That story about Mary and Martha. Who's got some sympathy for Martha there? Me? I'd much prefer to be reading a theology book than doing the washing-up. It is easy to be distracted from Jesus by all the practicalities. Keeping the show on the road. Someone who is not a Christian said to me this week – 'At the end of the day the church is a business, isn't it?' Actually it's all about Jesus. I didn't say it because it's not good to put someone down when they mean well. The thing is that we need the practicalities as Mary and Jesus needed something to eat that day in Bethany. We need the practicalities of someone opening up the church, getting the books out, welcoming, raising money, putting the rotas together and so on – and we are immensely grateful to those folk who do these things. But they're not the focus of what we are about.

Stuff – our lives are full of it and I don't just mean the physical stuff that around us. There's the stuff in here (heads) that buzzes around grabbing our attention. Must get in touch with... that needs doing... I should go to... How can we keep a focus on Jesus with all the *stuff* going on in our heads and all around us?

And then there are what we can call the intellectual distractions. Many of us will have seen this week the amazing photos from that James Webb space telescope – not to be confused with our own James Parsons. Those pictures showing galaxies from billions of light years away. That's seriously hard to get your head around. Which is harder to comprehend – the God who made that, loves you; or the God that loves you, made that? Our reading from Colossians speaks of Jesus as the *image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible...* Throw in dark matter, whatever that may be. And then think of the lunch guest sitting in Bethany with Mary listening and Martha fussing... Trying to get our heads around all of that – challenging, extremely.

Focus on Jesus. This morning Anna will tell you I leapt out of bed, going, *Yes, it's Sunday. I'm going to church not just once, not just twice but three times today!* Anyone else? OK, I may have exaggerated a little, but one of the good things about church is that it gives the real opportunity to focus on Jesus for a few minutes, if not for the full hour. Sing, pray, listen, (receive bread and wine) – the discipline of having that focus for one hour a week. To be honest if we can't make that a priority, it'll be really hard to focus on Jesus the rest of the week.

But let's not think about focusing on Jesus as another activity, something we do alongside all the other things we do. Let's think about how we can focus on Jesus as we go about all the stuff that makes up our days. Let me give you an example. I'm a new boy on the Town Council over in

Chepstow, and I do want to learn what it means to focus on Jesus as a Town Councillor. That certainly doesn't make me better than any of my colleagues. At a meeting last week I found myself saying, *We need to ask ourselves who is not at the table*. And then I was laughing, at least inwardly, thinking, *I'm channelling Bishop Rachel* – it is something she says often. Perhaps on Tuesday morning or maybe in the middle of Wednesday night when we feel ourselves overwhelmed by stuff we can simply pray – *Lord, help me to focus on Jesus*. It's not a magic formula but if we can learn to do it often and regularly it can give us perhaps a fighting chance of getting a good perspective.

There are some more clues from our passage in Colossians. In verse 23 Paul talks about continuing to be *securely established and steadfast in the faith*. That's a great phrase that is really saying the same as keeping a focus on Jesus. It speaks to me about being clear-thinking. Jesus is supreme, Lord of all creation, from the tiniest most precious new-born baby to the furthest flung galaxies. And he is the one who has reconciled us to God through his work on the cross. All these things. J B Phillips once wrote a book called *Your God is too small*. The title says it all. Let's read Scripture and sing our hymns and realise how great Jesus is, how utterly amazing. Be clear-headed, and also steadfast or maybe we could say, stable. When Jesus called Simon to follow him he gave him a new name – *Petros, Peter*, - the rock. It took him long enough to get there but thank God for people who are rocks – solid, stable, reliable Christian brothers and sisters. You know that if you ask them to pray for you, they will. If you want someone to talk to about anything, knowing that they won't be judging you or telling you what to do – a rock. Thank God for people who are rocks, but don't stop there – you can be a rock for... - well, fill in the gap.

Our passage in Colossians can help us answer another question too – what's it all for? Why focus on Jesus? It's there in verse 28 – *it is he, Jesus, whom we proclaim*. We focus on Jesus so others who don't know him yet can see him and even begin to focus on him themselves. If people can begin to see just something of Jesus in us, they may well become more interested not in us but in Jesus. There's a hope that my friend who thought that the bottom line is that the church is a business may actually see that it's a signpost to Jesus, a group of people who are trying in our own faltering but dogged way to worship and follow Jesus. Focus on Jesus – and there's a chance that others may see him too.

Prayer