



Kirkcaldy and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: groenstes@yahoo.com

www.knec4jesus.org.uk



Reading 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Sermon: 14 February 2010

Text verses for the sermon: 3-8

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^a: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter,^b and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Original text "Cephas" which is Aramaic for "Peter"

Sermon

Paul wrote this first letter to the believers in the harbour city of Corinth. As I said previously through various sermons the congregation in Corinth caused Paul many sleepless nights and much anxiety. In the letter itself it seems as if there were divisions among them because of various issues. Some, which I would call the "super Christians", thought that they had all the knowledge and wisdom of God. They were also contesting Paul's authoritative role as being called by God. In both letters that we have it seems as if Paul had to defend his position as an apostle the whole time. We even find it in reading this morning where Paul says something of his role as leader of the Church and how he became involved in preaching the good news.

In our reading it is also evident that his reasoning was typical of a Jewish Rabbi. He starts by making a general statement which no one could deny namely that he preached the Gospel that they received when they came to faith. He handed down this Gospel to them like a Jewish teacher who would pass on his teachings to his students, who would

^a Or you at the first

^b Greek *Cephas*

Aramaic ***Aramaic**. A language related to Hebrew that was the standard international language of the ancient Near East before Alexander the Great's conquests made Greek the standard; it was still widely spoken in different forms in Syria-Palestine and farther east in Jesus' day. Most Jewish people in first-century Palestine probably spoke both Greek and Aramaic.

in turn pass them on to their own students. The students could take notes, but they delighted especially in oral memorization and became quite skilled at it; memorization was a central feature of ancient education.

Most probably our text verses for the sermon, verses 3-7 may have been a verbatim quote of the original tradition.

Paul also emphasises that Jesus rose on the third day according to the original tradition. Paul goes on by stating that Jesus appeared to several people. IN general we know of 10 appearances altogether despite the fact that Paul only mentions 5, one of which, that to James, is not given elsewhere. What he gives is conclusive evidence of the fact, particularly when re-enforced by his own experience (the sixth appearance mentioned by Paul). The Twelve is only a technical term because we know only ten were present, for Judas was dead and Thomas was absent.

So Paul does not break with the original tradition in witnessing and confessing the Christian faith. He emphasis it even more when he says that some of the 500 are still living and they can attest to the appearance of Jesus after He was resurrected.

Then Paul goes on by stating his own position. Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus. Although he persecuted the followers of Jesus, he was forgiven and called by God to proclaim the good news. And this he did with enthusiasm and zeal by God's mercy!

In these few verses Paul exposes the main nerve of the Christian faith. He spells out to the people in the Corinthian church in no uncertain terms the only truth of Jesus' salvation and hope to everyone who responds in faith. He also defends his own position as someone who witnessed the presence of God. He reaffirms his own position to preach only ONE Word and that is the Word of God, to proclaim only ONE faith and that is in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and to live the hope of the everlasting kingdom.

After studying the text and reading it over and over again, I was captivated. I could not help but wonder how on earth could Paul still write in such a polite manner to these people who caused him so many sleepless nights? How could he even bother to write to

them? Why did he waste his time in defending himself?

I could come to only ONE conclusion: he did it because he loved them! On this day that the world celebrates “love”, I have to emphasize I am talking of a different love. Paul had genuine Christian love for the people in Corinth, love that is willing to forget and forgive even if it means seventy times seventy, love that is willing to sacrifice despite the costs and love that cannot be broken or hindered by circumstances or situations of ill feelings. He loved them as Christ compelled him to do. He obeyed the Lord of Love who showed us the real meaning of LOVE!

He loved them so much that he did not want to waste time in NOT telling them about the nerve and the true meaning of the Christian faith. He loved them so much that he did not want them to miss out on the love, hope that Christ offers to each and everyone that is willing to follow him. And in this he sets an example for us to follow.

We can sometimes be put off by other people who do not respond to our examples of Christian love, our witnesses of faith and our outreach to them by proclaiming the Good News. When people are cruel to us while we are kind and loving, we tend to back off and just leave them alone! Paul urges us to continue to proclaim the Gospel despite hostility or pressure not to do it. He compels us not to forget the LOVE that God had for us to share with each and everyone that crosses our walks in life. He makes us aware of the importance of our responsibility as followers of Jesus.

We must stand firm in our faith. We can be so busy doing the “work of the Church” instead of focusing on our one and only real mission namely to confess and be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can be so preoccupied by life itself that we forget that it is only temporal. We all are going to die but God prepared a new life for us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ broke down all the barriers that existed between God and us. He even overpowered death. Everyone that believes in him has already received the promise of God’s everlasting kingdom in heaven.

We can so easily forget that we received the new life in Christ Jesus. We are not permanent citizens of this world but citizens of the everlasting kingdom of God. We can so easily be caught up in the distresses of present day living and forget that we received the new life in Christ. And yes, when we think of this life as an only option we can forget what life is all about. Life is not only for living – it is life dedicated to the glory of God. We did not receive life only to fulfil our ambitions and selfish needs but to please God. This life is not our end but only the beginning of a journey to be forever with God.

We are like Paul the messengers of God and his everlasting kingdom. It is so important that we present to our world this new life in Christ in such a way that it is loving, welcoming and appealing to all. We have to be witnesses of this everlasting Kingdom wherever we go. We have to proclaim it with joy and exclamation. Our lives must resemble this hope in the way we suffer, despair, laugh, and joke, live, eat, blether, drive, work, argue, and disagree! We have to go out again and again, despite everything that may hinder us and tell everyone about the hope that God gave us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must never ever be silenced by the ignorance, hostility and open aggression of the world and people around us.

Yes we are the messengers of God's kingdom issued with a key to enter through the redemption and reconciliation of Christ. And as foreigners to this life on earth, we should carry this key with us everywhere we go!

I read of a Muslim man who became a Christian in Africa. Some of his friends asked him, "Why did you become a Christian?" He answered, "Well, It's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions and you didn't know which way to go, and there at the fork in the road were two men, one dead and one alive. Which one would you ask which way to go?" Off course the living one, that is Jesus Christ!

May God help us that we never forget this as we journey through life!

Amen