

SUNDAY THOUGHTS – 30/08/2020

Hello everyone and welcome to another "Thoughts." We begin our time with an old hymn All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyPT3IVSpmo>

An item shared by Margaret

Over the last few weeks, I have been chatting to a homeless man in Morrison's car park. I asked him how he got into the situation he found himself in. I obviously did not get the whole story, you never do, but what was clear was just how difficult it is to get any social housing in Bolton. He had risen to 200th in the queue, but had previously been 500th! The system seems quite complicated, and if something goes amiss you lose your place in the queue. Over the last few months, we have been more confined to our homes, and some people have barely left the house but, these last few days and nights when it has been pouring down with rain, we are grateful to be safe in the shelter of our houses. So, let us give thanks for our homes. Let us remember that Jesus himself was homeless both as an infant and in his ministry. We bring before him:

- those who have lost their homes through natural disasters
- those who have been driven from their homes by war and terror
- those who have lost their homes through poverty
- those who have been driven from their homes by unkindness
- those who seek continually for a home and cannot find one

Lord, send them help through their fellow human beings' concern and practical aid, and may we play our own part in such care.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCRi0W1oZKw>

Ephesians 2:1-10 "This is my story; this is my song."

As for you, you who were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world, and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and followed its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For

it by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Many years ago, I was sitting on a bench on Guisborough High Street waiting (as usual!) for Margaret. I was suddenly joined by a complete stranger (In the far-off days before "social distancing!"). Within a few minutes she had told me all about her life. I came away from that encounter knowing at least 10 things about her. Here was a lady with a history, a "story" which she shared with me that day.

We all have a "story" and in many ways our stories have similarities; where we were born, the family we grew up in, the school we attended and so on. Yet our stories are unique to us. They will most likely never make the pages of a newspaper, but they are important to us.

I have a very old friend called Norman Jenkins. He and his brother Allan and I attended this church as young people. Norman wrote his story some years ago now. He lived in Winter Street, just round the corner from the church, and describes very well the life of ordinary folk living in Horwich in the 1950's. Norman went on to become a lecturer in Social Work. Another schoolfriend of Norman and myself is Alan Leech. (The three of us went to Albert Street University for boys!). He in the process of writing his story. Alan became headteacher of a school in Hampshire. He had a cousin called Ken whose parents had an ironmongers on Lee Lane. Ken joined the Police Force. In his book **True Witness**, Ken describes his involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses, then his remarkable conversion to Christianity.

People know so much more about their families now than they used to, because of Internet sites such as Find My Past or Ancestry UK, tracing people from centuries ago, and researching their family tree.

One of the founding members of this church, Kingsley Melling wrote about his life calling it "The Diary of a Nobody." When he was 100, Sue put together a lovely book about his life, collecting stories by people who had known him. His son, George who took over Kingsley's chemist shop on Chorley Old road wrote his own story.

Those who belong to Jesus have an amazing story, a unique story. Every Christian will have a different story to tell , but at the same time there will be a similar pattern to it. In the passage in Ephesians Paul sets this out.

- In vs 1-3 Paul describes what sort of life the people in the church at Ephesus were living before they became Christians - their (and our) **PAST**. He doesn't hold back and gives them both barrels! At the same time, he does not pretend he was any better. He says that his past as well as theirs was dark

and lost (v3, **all of us**; v4 **we were**). They were living a sort of death, blind to God's love and deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, but they were being controlled by the world, Satan and the flesh.

- What was true of these people all those years ago is true of us today. If we are honest, we know that this accurately describes us, before we turned in faith to Jesus. Whilst we may have never robbed a bank, or committed a murder we know that we are sinners in the sight of God.
- Next, Paul describes their (and our) **PRESENT**. Because of God's great love for them (v4), their lives have been transformed. Instead of being dead, they are now alive (v5); once they were lost, now they are saved (v5); once they were in the world, now they are in Christ (v6); once they were on the receiving end of God's wrath (v4), now they are the objects of his love (v4), mercy (v4), and grace (v5). They are "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven." They are raised, and seated with Christ (v6). They were reigning with Christ whilst still living on earth, and that's the same for you and me!
- Finally, Paul turns to their (and our) **FUTURE**. Someone's life story consists of the past and the present, simply because the future is unknown and remains unknown. As Christians, we are unable to map out our future, but what is certain is, that like the Christians in Ephesus, we will be with God for ever and he will be more loving and more gracious than we can imagine. He will show us the "**incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**." (v7). This future is beyond anything we can imagine. As 1 Corinthians 2v9 says: **What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things that God has prepared for those who love him**.
- This then is the story of all those who belong to Christ and seek to serve him. When people write and tell their stories, naturally it is about **THEM**, their childhood, family career etc, but the Christian's story is primarily about Christ and a desire to share him with others. Again, a person might make mention of personal achievement as part of a life story. Instead, the Christian will want to say, "**This is not what I've done, but what he has done!**" Paul's word for this is **GRACE** (v5,8). The Message says: **It's God's grace from start to finish**.
- Finally, Paul leaves them, and us with a challenge - to **live out** our story. We need to show that what has happened to us is real and powerful by how we live (v9). With God's help and grace, let us rise to the challenge!

We are going "country style" for our next song!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BE_SryWgNY&list=RD0BE_SryWgNY&start_radio=1&t=0

Points for Thanksgiving and Prayer

Pray for our nation, that our leaders will be given wisdom and integrity. Pray that the spread of the virus will be halted.

Pray for those people who have had hospital appointments delayed and operations cancelled due to the virus. We think especially of those who now find it is now too late for their surgery to take place. Grant them your comfort and peace in these dark days.

Pray for people with mental health issues; for those weighed down with worry, not knowing where to turn. We ask that they will find a way through, and you will send others to them who can help in their distress.

Pray for our church; that we will get to know God better, and find opportunities to tell others about Jesus. Pray for the Elders that God will give them wisdom in their decisions as they lead the church.

Pray for people who live alone. We remember those who are struggling with health issues. Help them draw near to God in their time of need.

Pray for our young people as they return to school in September.

Pray for the outreach in the neighbourhood near the church through the Good News papers. Some of the team are hoping to visit shops and businesses along with the Horwich Angels. Please pray for this opportunity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8DcFHkODBc>

A final prayer

Dear Father God, we thank and praise you for all you have done for us and will continue to do for us. Help us by your power and grace to show our gratitude by how we live each day. Amen.

God bless, Ray and Margaret