Notes on Ephesians 1 : 4, 15 – 19, John 17 : 20 – 26 'The Heart of Love'

This week has been filled by VE Day celebrations we may have seen on our TV's, or in going to our VE Day here in church or at the beacon lighting at Sindelfingen Park. On Wednesday I was at Lenthall Infants school where I led an assembly around my mum's experience as a 6 year old evacuee. On Thursday I listened to Churchill's stirring VE Day speech and sung the Vera Lynn song 'White Cliffs of Dover' with its vision of peace three times. All of these different elements were filled with a profound sense of gratitude. Gratitude summarised the feelings of all of those who had gathered in St Peter's Square on Thursday to hear the news of the election of the new Pope. Gratitude is what our response is to be when we think about the many blessings Paul writes about in verses 3 - 14 and the primary outlet for this gratitude is prayer. Today we begin to enter into Paul's prayer in verses 15 – 19 where we see and feel what motivated and inspired him as an Apostle, of how it fed into his Apostolic ministry as well as the five-fold ministry of the church, whether it be in Ephesus or here in Dronfield. To live a blessed life is our basic identity. It is a life rooted in prayer and we will understand clearer what this vast and expansive life is as we follow Paul's describing what each of these blessings mean.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus or Paul prayed? The simple answer is they prayed because of love. Both Jesus and Paul prayed because they had both been captivated and controlled by love. What is the basis for this love for God? It is that they both knew they had been chosen by God, as described in verse 4. When Paul, or I, talk about election, that is of God choosing people, the usual response is to ask, 'Why me and not someone else?' We may then rant and rave against God being capricious and unfair or else we may become paranoid as we try and work out if we are genuinely chosen by God. However, all such responses reflect the many and varied arguments of ancient cul-de-sacs and are a grand exercise in missing the point. The reason for this is because election is primarily not about salvation, it is about vocation. Thus, when Ed Tomlinson is in his pit under his beloved Austin or Simon Temple is going to a Uke gig or I'm going out we all do one thing in common; we choose. Ed chooses a particular tool, Simon chooses a particular ukelele and I choose a particular set of Docs. Our choosing does not mean that we reject the other tools, or ukes or shoes as unwanted or unworthy, it's just that they are not fit for the purpose we have in mind. Election is rooted in Genesis 12 and why God chose Abram. He chose Abram and his family because God wanted the whole world to be blessed or saved. God chose Jesus, he chose Paul because they were his chosen instruments through which the mystery of God's salvation would be made known to all.

God chooses us because we have all been given a joint vocation, which is to be holy and blameless. To be holy and blameless is to be made into the image and likeness of Jesus which in broadbrush strokes means loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and loving our neighbour as ourselves. This vocation is not like an award we place on the mantlepiece to admire and dust, instead it is a life lived where we reflect Jesus into all the world because we know we are secure in the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The heart and soul of election is to compel us to live this way, because to be chosen by God is to pray your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

through me. This is the heart of both Jesus' prayer in John 17 and Paul's prayer here in Ephesians 1.

In John 17 Jesus prays at the point where he is standing between life and death. He is standing between the form of ministry we read of in the Gospels where he taught and demonstrated that the Kingdom of God had come among them and the ministry of his dying for the world as the Lamb of God. In verses 20 – 26 of Jesus' prayer, we remind ourselves that Jesus is praying for Paul and the church at Ephesus and he is praying for me, for Zania, for Joshua and for us as a church here in Dronfield. Like all prayer it is shaped by love which is why it is such a vast prayer. Jesus prays for us to know the oneness which he and the Father knows in verses 21 and 23. He prays that the unity we know will deepen and flourish as we know more and more in our lives the bond of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as described in verses 21, 23, 24 and 26. Jesus prays that we may all be filled with glory in verses 22 and 24, which speaks of our knowing the incredible presence of God within and among us. Jesus prays that we will be missional in verse 23, as we make this astonishing love known to the world around us. Finally, Jesus prays that we might be filled with the hope we know in Jesus in verse 24, as nothing can separate us from this Father, Son and Holy Spirit love. The vastness of Jesus' prayer we hear echoing in Paul's prayer in verses 17 – 19.

VE Day is a celebration day amid war for World War 2 did not finish until 15th August 1945. The cross and resurrection of Jesus are our VE Day and we are to celebrate the triumph of Jesus, but we must remember the war is not yet over and this is the reason why being chosen is so important to our lives. We are to know that we have been called to be holy, to be blameless, to be like Jesus because our loving God yearns for this whole town, this whole world to see, to meet, to know Jesus in us. This is why we have been chosen, so may we all go and live as Jesus would have us do so that the light and love of Jesus may shine through us in our community and that others may come to believe too.