

Notes on Ephesians 2 : 11 – 13, Ezekiel 36 : 22 – 30, Jeremiah 31 : 31 – 34
‘But Now.... we are New’

I hope you have been enjoying the Winter Olympics and when we watch the athletes on the ice and the snow is to genuinely see ‘poetry in motion’ and go ‘Wow!!’ It has also been a ‘Wow!!’ for Britain with the athletes winning three golds and it is the first time Britain has ever won a gold on snow and have a double Olympic champion. ‘Poetry in Motion’ is a brilliant way of describing the awe and wonder we should feel when we think about the cross and the resurrection too. This is where our Lent course helps us. *Lectio Divina* is about helping us read and immerse ourselves in the Bible so that we may hear God speak to us. God speaks to us that we may believe Jesus died and was raised for us and that we may know the love of Jesus and the work of the Spirit in our lives today. This makes us more like him and points us towards our future hope of resurrection. This is what I meant when we spoke of ‘But God...’ and what I mean when we speak of ‘But now...’ ‘Poetry in Motion’ describes our learning to live in the ‘new’ which Jesus has won and Jesus has done for us.

Last week Joshua spoke about the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus and thank you for how you’ve helped us understand what the ‘But Now...’ in Jesus means. When we think of the ‘But Now...’ we are to think of the promise of a new Temple, a new creation and the presence of God in our lives. In 2001 I visited Kathmandu in Nepal and one of the things I never quite used to, was the sheer number of temples I saw. This is the sort of world which Paul lived in as he walked through Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi etc. One thing we need to realise is how utterly alien Temple language is to us. It is not the same as walking past a row of churches in a town centre, since each temple is staking the claims of its own gods against all the others. For a Jew, such as Saul of Tarsus, the stench of idolatry was completely repulsive to him. But for Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, he was moved by Jesus to feel compassion for all of those people who were enslaved to death, sin and the devil.

Verses 11 and 12 describe what it means to be utterly and completely lost. Being ‘lost’ is as true as ever now as it was then but we need to reimagine what being lost looks and feels like today and therefore what the Good News looks like in a post-Christian and post-Christendom culture. For Paul being lost means three things. Firstly, to be lost is to be without Christ. What he means by this is that people do not have Jesus as the Son of God who fulfils the Father’s plans and purposes in their lives. They do not have Jesus as the one who has won the victory over death, sin and the devil for them. They do not have Jesus as the lamb of God who died in their place for their sins. They do not have Jesus as their High priest who is for ever interceding on their behalf. Secondly, to be lost is to be excluded from the citizenship of the People of God. This means that they have no King to rule over them, but also no one to guard, guide and protect them. This means they have no privileges before this King who comes to them as a brother and friend. This means they have no status in this world; they are a nobody who knows nothing of how precious they are to this King. Thirdly, to be lost means they are foreigners to the Covenant and thus they have no identity. They are far from God and therefore are his enemies. Instead of having a heart of flesh, they have a heart of stone which is usually unfeeling, hard and indifferent to those around them. They are therefore unholy before a holy God and so they are left to live in the

dark because they dare not come into the light. They therefore know nothing of the Spirit of God dwelling within them.

All of these are echoes found in Romans 1 verses 18 – 32 and chapter 3 verse 23, but Jesus reverses all of this because he makes all things new in verse 13. In Jesus we see the creation of a new humanity where we are now being made in the image and likeness of Jesus. This is what Ezekiel 36 verses 22 – 30 and Jeremiah 31 verses 31 – 34 speak about. In verse 13 there is a sense of shock as neither Ezekiel nor Jeremiah would have guessed whose blood it was that was going to be shed. It was not the blood of a lamb, instead it was the blood of the Servant and this Servant was not just a man, though he is that, he was also the Son of God. This was way beyond all and every expectation Israel had of how God would fulfil his Plans and Purposes and the question is, do you know this for yourself?

To know this is to know the Christ who has triumphed over sin, death and the devil. It is to know the Lamb who has cleansed you from every sin and made you whole. It is to know the High Priest who intercedes for you day in and day out, who knows your every weakness and frailty and loves you completely. To know this is to be made a citizen of heaven where you know that you belong and that you are at last home. It is to be loved, treasured and cherished by the King who knows you by name. It is to be as privileged as if you were native born because you have now been adopted into the royal family. It is to have the status of being part of the People of God who are the apple of God's eye. To know this is to be part of the Covenant which God has made guaranteeing every promise he has made in Christ. It is to have a brand new identity, for you are now a child of God. You are now truly and fully human able to love God with all that you are and to love your neighbour as yourself thereby keeping the Law as God always intended. It is to be a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells in all his fullness thus empowering you to live this new life.

This is what 'But Now...' means and may all of us learn to live it out in our lives in all of the fulness Jesus promises to us to the praise and glory of Jesus.