

Notes on Ephesians 2 : 8 – 10, Philippians 1 : 27 – 30
‘But God... is at work in you’

Today I'm sad to say there will be no Thunderbirds video, but the good news is, is that I have one about Joe 90. As a small boy I loved Joe 90 and all the exploits he got up to which I wanted to imitate. He was able to do amazing daring deeds because of the BIG RAT technology which on reflection is quite disturbing tech since it allowed different brain waves to be imposed on his brain!! When we looked at verses 6 and 7 we saw a trophy cabinet with God showing off all that he has done for his creation in Jesus. The image now changes to a writer's desk in verse v10. Here the focus is on God being at work in you, or rather in us, that we may fulfil the promises given to Abram in Genesis 12 verse 3 and help us see that God is up to in his world.

So, what do you think God is up to in his world? The simple answer is salvation, and that is what we are to be doing too. We will hear this on Tuesday when the Watoto Choir from Uganda sing their amazing songs about the salvation they know in their lives. We have on our wall Joshua's 'Salvation' board where we are encouraged to pray for people who we know to be saved. We have joined this month a YBA initiative called the Growth Collective, which will encourage and enable us to be a church who will regularly see people come to faith. On Sunday we come to worship we celebrate God being at work in us and the wonder of his saving love for us. In worship we focus on Jesus and his death on the cross and his being raised from the dead so that we may once again put our faith and trust in him. We celebrate his gift of salvation and his work in our lives as this is the root of our assurance and confidence in him; we know we can trust in him. This means we need to rethink what Paul says about works here.

When Paul speaks about works here in Ephesians, we need to remind ourselves that he is speaking as a first century Christian whose heritage is as a Jew. Works here are not about our self-achievement where we earn our salvation but how we affirm our identity. When Paul speaks about works, or the works of the Law, he is thinking of those things which defined the Jewish community against their Gentile neighbours such as circumcision, the keeping of the sabbath and all of their food laws. This identity was used by the Jewish people to protect their identity in a hostile world and help keep their distance from their Gentile neighbours.

Paul writes against this for two reasons. Firstly, our identity is now based on faith and faith alone as it something which Jew and Gentile both need to do when they come to Jesus. Secondly, our works are not to be a barrier which separate us from people, instead they are to be a sign which points them to the Kingdom. We focus on faith not because the Law is too hard, after all it is 'only' a matter of loving God and your neighbour as yourself. Also, if we focus on keeping the Law, it can snare us into boasting about our moral and spiritual superiority against others. This was the mistake Israel made about keeping the Law as they forgot it was there to help them shine as light in a dark world, not for them to erect barriers which then hid this light.

Faith reminds us of the Father's wide-open arms, of the Son's wide-open arms on the cross and the Holy Spirit given extravagantly and lavishly to ALL. Over the next 20 months we will be part of this Growth Collective and in the first year you and I will be

mentored and accompanied by the YBA team and ministers from our Collective to learn and discern how to cast vision, change the culture of our church, create community and grow leaders. This process will be of immense benefit to us now and as you enter a time of pastoral vacancy. This is what I meant by the phrase 'poetry in motion'. It describes the works which God has prepared for us to do and we are to boast in these works because it is a privilege to show Jesus to people. It is a joy when we see the joy of Jesus infect them. They can at times be very inconvenient to do these works as there are times when we would prefer not to do them. They can be at times very demanding emotionally, spiritually, physically and mentally but I guess this is why they are called works as they require such time and effort.

God is at work in us so that by our works others may come to know God working in them. One of the reasons for this is because I want people to stand before the Father's throne and hear them testify to my Father on my behalf about what I have done and how Jesus blessed them through me. I want people to testify to the Father on your behalf too and I could speak about our Toddler groups, or Coffee Pot and the many ways we seek to bless and to enrich our community, but this would only apply to some of you. Instead think about the works that we are all able to do such as knocking on your neighbour's door to have a chat or lend a helping hand. Think about how you spend what people call your leisure time, and I do appreciate that some of you may have too much of it because you may be housebound. Your leisure time is not a time to forget God, instead it is an opportunity for God to be at work through you. I think of Gilli at her gym classes where she has built many friendships and opportunities to care. Or you may be able to serve in our community such as in our schools, U3A or Dronfield 2gether to name just three. For all of us at work, what do works look like for you in your workplace recognising how much it has changed in the last five years. Or your works can be seen as seeking to create community for those around you which is proving to be such a fruitful way of sharing Jesus today. All of this is what Paul is saying to this church in Philippi too in Philippians 1 verses 27 – 30, when he encourages them not to be discouraged by his being in prison but for them to make him proud as they love and serve Jesus there in their city.

I spoke about a writer's desk because we are all God's poem. Like a poem our lives are filled with joy but also tragedy. Poems describe our lives filled with numerous gifts but of the loss we experience too. Poems remind us how our lives are filled with times of profound awe and lots of fun too. Poems give us space to rest and inspire us to work too. To see life as poetry means we see our lives very differently to how our culture and society does. We see life as one filled with lots of different hues as in our 3 E's, (Engaging with Jesus, Enabling all to meet Jesus and Enriching our Community). Life is about love, of loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbour as ourselves. May we all embrace our lives as God intended us to do so that for all of us they may indeed be 'poetry in motion'.