

Notes on Ephesians 2 : 19 – 22, Matthew 21 : 33 – 44 ‘But Now.... we are home’

Do you come from a perfect family where there are no arguments, fights or disagreements? Where the answer is always ‘yes mum’ to any task or chore you’re asked to do? Today in church we had an impromptu sticker Sunday because people knowing your name, instead of going ‘uuuummm’, is crucial. It’s not that I expect everyone to know everyone else’s name, that’s my job, but I do think that it matters for all of us to know some names but to be always open to know more.

Today’s ‘But Now...’ is divided into two parts and both are equally important. The first part is in verses 19 and 20 where we are described as no longer being like an immigrant or refugee in God’s sight but instead we now are part of the Family of God because we’ve come home. This ‘But Now...’ means we all have a strong identity and a status because we’ve been properly and legally adopted by God the Father into his family. What this means for us emotionally is that we have gained a sense of belonging, we know that each and every one of us regardless of age, gender or ability have value and I really hope that we all feel this to be true for all of us.

We know that this is true as regards how God thinks and feels about each one of us since that is what the ‘But God...’ says in verses 4 and 5. Part of the ministry of the Spirit is to reassure us that this is truly true and that we can build our lives safely and securely on this, but what about us as a church, is this equally true? This is a far harder question to answer because, to put it simply, we are human and so we fail. This means that just like any other family we argue, we fight, we disagree, but, and this is something which the Spirit teaches us again and again and that is to live in the difference Jesus has made in us. The best example of this is the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 verses 21 – 35. This parable is rooted in the question of how often are we to forgive each other when we are sinned against and the short answer is always. Read the parable again and see what Jesus says.

This is where the demands of ‘But Now...’ come into play. If you wore a sticker today in church with your name on, I want you to know ‘But Now...’ that you are equally important, equally valuable and equally precious. There is more. If you wore a sticker today in church with your name on, I want you to know ‘But Now...’ that you are called to love and to serve however you are able. For example, we need people to help out at this year’s Holiday Club because for all of the right reasons a large part of last year’s team are unable to help. It will be lots of fun, tiring and energising as you share the life and love of Jesus with 50 children. There is even more. If you wore a sticker today in church with your name on, I want you to know ‘But Now...’ you are to live like Jesus as described in verse 20. To be part of Jesus’ family, or to use an older turn of phrase, to be part of his house is to be willing to be built into his house. This is an odd way of thinking or looking at it, but Jesus is God’s brickie who wants each and every one of us to be cemented by his love into this house, this family that we will know that we are loved and belong, but that others may come to know this for themselves too.

The second image evolves from the first. Paul has described Jesus as a brickie building a family, or a house, but now the house no longer homes a family but God, which makes it a Temple. The language of Temple is one of the biggest threads which

runs through the Bible from that of creation to a Tent, then to a Temple, now to a group of very peculiar people who are all bearers and signs of God's new creation. For what will happen one day is that God will rebuild all of creation back into a renewed Temple when finally, all will celebrate and know God is our God and we are his people.

Matthew 21 is part of this retelling of Israel's story, but it was told in such an unexpected way that no one wanted to hear it. For in this retelling the biggest twist is that Jesus is now the cornerstone. In saying this Jesus lays claim to be the one who defines what it means to be, to belong and behave as the People, or Family of God. No wonder he was crucified by those who were infuriated by this claim because Jesus was saying to them that in effect, they were now foreigners and strangers to God. For us it is a picture of comfort because we can know him to be the foundation of our lives as individuals and as a church. A complementary idea to this is the language of Jesus being the keystone because he is the one who holds the building together and thus the most important of stones. Both images remind us that Jesus is here and that as cornerstone and keystone he is the fulfilment of the Bible's many promises which speak about us knowing God's presence.

We know Jesus as we show kindness, goodness and love to each other and in our relationships with each other. Knowing someone's name matters and that we don't say just 'hello uuummmmm', but understand being part of the family of God, the Temple of God is to share our lives together. We know Jesus is here in our worship by his Spirit, for worship is all about our encountering his loving, kind, gracious, merciful and good presence together. We know Jesus is here in our ministries as we share his love with each other as well as when we share his love with this wonderful town in which most of us live. We know Jesus is here in the worlds of school and at work because he has promised to enter those rooms with us. We know Jesus is here in our homes which can be very happily noisy, as well as very quiet. We know Jesus is here as we walk or drive through the fantastic Peaks and if we are able to enjoy a holiday. We know Jesus is here when we sit in the dentist's chair, when we see our doctor, when we keep our hospital appointments and when we struggle with news which is challenging to live with. We know and hear the voice of Jesus at such times as these.

'But now...', is what Mother's Day is about and about knowing the life and love of Jesus in all our lives, to know the astonishing blessings of God and that others may come to know them in their lives too.