

Sunday@7.00 30/04/17 'Come and See'

My talk tonight is a bit like a news sandwich! I'm going to tell you some good news, then some not so good news, then some more good news!

The first good news is that, through prayer on Thursday at Beauty from Ashes, a healing ministry charity led by Jen Rees Larcombe, God has healed me from a frozen shoulder from which I've been suffering for eighteen months! Praise the Lord!

The bad news is we all sin, either in ignorance or knowingly.

But, the good news is the gospel – that God loves us so much, he gave his Son to die for us so we might be forgiven of our sinfulness.

My aim this evening in this talk is to convince you that it's worth your while knowing and loving Jesus!

Question: If someone is knocking at your door, do you open it? Maybe sometimes. Maybe not always.

How do you know who is on the other side knocking? If you could know who that person is, would that make a difference to your opening the door?

What if that someone was offering you more love than anyone has done or ever will do?

Jesus says in Revelation 3.20,

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

Jesus is that person at the door, knocking – the person who wants to love you more than any love you've known before or will do. Jesus is standing on the other side of the door, trying to get our attention. He's saying, “Let me into your life!” Jesus not only knocks but he calls to us, so we are in no doubt who is doing the knocking.

In Jesus' day, even an acquaintance would invite a neighbour in for food who was knocking. Sharing a meal established fellowship between people. Here, Jesus is knocking on the door of a person's heart. **He** approaches us. It is an

invitation. He wants to have fellowship with us. Why? Because God is seeking his people through Jesus. He is appealing to us to change our attitudes and turn to him. He knows our need for him.

Jesus also recognises our freedom in this matter. He doesn't force himself into our hearts. He gives us a choice. He says if we welcome him, he comes and dwells with us. We can choose to open the door to Jesus, to embrace a relationship with him that will lead to eternal life.

In John 6.40 we read these words of Jesus, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

And in one of our readings, John 3.16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

So, Jesus has come for that relationship with us, not to condemn us for all that is wrong with our lives (yes we are sinful, remember!). Acts 13.38, our second reading tells us, "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."

Jesus presents us a gift – the gift of himself, so that through him, we may become children of God. In his gospel, John tells us, "to all who did receive him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." We need to choose to believe in him, we are not automatically children of God.

We have to open the door...

You might think, well eternal life is all well and good, but it's something I can't really envisage now; what about the here and now, my life now? Why do I need Jesus?

Well, I can tell you why I need Jesus...

Most of my Christian friends grew up in Christian families. They listened to Bible stories told at home or at Sunday school. They attended church and as young teenagers were confirmed. Most of them have known God in their lives from as far back as they can remember. Their faith may have changed, matured, or they may have had periods when they felt more distant from God, but at the core of their lives is a learnt faith. My story is different. My parents weren't Christians, in fact my dad was an atheist who was a big fan of Erik von

Daniken, a writer who believed that extraterrestrials had visited the earth in ancient history, interpreting sections of the Old Testament in terms of spaceships and aliens!

My life journey, on the whole, has not been an easy one. I won't go into detail, but after a difficult childhood and teenage years, and then struggling with identity during my twenties, I reached a very challenging time of my life at the age of thirty. I found myself walking into a church in east London, not knowing why. I just knew I had to walk in that door. On the other side was the curate who welcomed me and recognized my need for help. She became a good friend, encouraged me to come to church, to join an Alpha course, and I eventually made the choice to welcome Jesus into my life and be confirmed.

From the point of walking in that church door I felt something. I knew something. I changed. I had the feeling of being accepted, loved and that I belonged. It wasn't an instant revelation, rather a gradual awareness of truth. It was more a feeling of hope, that light had entered my life; that I could trust, perhaps for the very first time. Jesus says to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11.28) I didn't know at the time, but I believe he was calling me to draw near to him, to rely on him.

Now I'm not saying I had a conversion experience as Saint Paul on the Damascus Road! I hadn't been persecuting Christians, but I must confess I did think they were weirdos! And how could they be so sure about something? My life experience up to then had left me filled with many doubts. But today I can say with all confidence, I've never been so sure of anything in my whole life. I am loved unconditionally by God who created me to live in relationship with him. I have meaning and purpose to my life. I know I am never alone and can ask for God's help in times of trouble. I'm at peace knowing I can say sorry when I sin and am forgiven. God has brought healing into my life in so many ways. That's the difference Jesus has made.

Christianity is about relationships. Our relationship with God who made us, and our relationships with each other.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22.37) and the second is to "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22.40).

Without this relationship with God we will always be striving to fill an emptiness.

Rick Warren, a writer and pastor in America says, “You were made *by* God and *for* God – and until you understand that, life will never make sense. It is only in God that we discover our origin, our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance and our destiny.”

We live in a world where aspirations of beauty, success, affluence, status and image have become gods to many. Our society places much value on material things, money, and power, with goals of self-satisfaction and instant gratification. People try to fill this void in different ways – accumulating more money to buy more and more things, addictions to drugs, sex, alcohol... None of these satisfy the deep hunger inside us. They are all transitory, give us brief satisfaction and don't last.

Superficial beauty fades, investments fluctuate, there are no guarantees about our health and security, no matter how well-connected we are.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6.35) because he knows he is the only one who can satisfy our deepest hunger – which is to restore our relationship with God! And until we're living in a relationship with God we'll never find our true meaning and purpose of life.

C.S.Lewis, one of my favourite Christian writers wrote, God “wants you to know Him: wants to give you Himself. And He and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble – delightedly humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life.”

We need Jesus because none of us is good enough to stand before a holy God because of our sinful nature. And we can never make ourselves good enough for God. We can't save ourselves by trying to be good. If we continue to try to sort out the mess in our lives by ourselves, we will always be disappointed. That's why Jesus came. He made it possible for God to accept us, just as we are – whatever we've done and however messed up we are. Jesus died on the cross for us. He suffered death as a sacrifice for our sin, he paid the penalty, overcame death, so that we might become God's children through faith in him. He offers us a share in his triumph – to all who will accept it. This is the good news of the gospel.

The effect of the good news is that we are justified, put right with God, we are forgiven – because of God's amazing mercy to the world through his Son.

The moment you trust in Jesus, you enter into an unbreakable relationship with God. Your life will never be the same! Both now and for all eternity. Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). God wants you to experience how much he loves you, and he wants you to learn how to do life with him.

Do you hear Jesus knocking on the door of your life? Do you hear him calling out to you?

If you're not a Christian and want to know how to be forgiven of your sins and follow Jesus, then open that door, say yes to Jesus and receive him as your saviour, trusting in what he's done for you on the cross. God will work in your heart and your life to change you and make you more like him. You're guaranteed to be on a very exciting journey!

And those of us who do know Jesus in our lives, let us surrender more of ourselves to him tonight. Whether you believe or are still wondering, you have a choice – to open the door and invite Jesus in – to **all** the rooms of our house...

There's a prayer written by Nicky Gumbel, the pioneer of Alpha, which is a great way to start that relationship with God. If you feel ready to accept God's gift and invite him to come and live within you, please feel free to pray.