

## 10am Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June – Baptism and Holy Communion

### Gal 3:23-29 and Luke 8:26-39 – What does it mean to become a Christian?

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians, we heard Paul talking about what it means to be baptised into Christ.

When Paul writes about how, ***before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law*** he's referring to the law of the Old Testament: given by God to the Israelites after they'd escaped slavery in Egypt, as rules for right living under God. All of us, before Christ came into our lives, were living under one kind of code or another: our own, or somebody else's; and finding it impossible to live perfectly, however hard we might try.

But when we start to see our lives through Jesus' eyes; the mistakes that have hurt the people we love; everything we're ashamed of; the pride that insists on doing things our way rather than God's way; then we're allowing the Holy Spirit to show us our sin, and to open us up to being changed by Christ.

As Paul puts it, being ***baptised into Christ [means you] have clothed yourself with Christ***. Being in Christ is the Christian's new identity. But when the Christian puts on Christ, it is more than the marker of a new identity – as a student graduating from university will wear a gown, or as the King, at his coronation, put on his coronation robes. The Christian who has put their trust in Christ is enabled to live differently, to begin to live in a more Christ-like way, because they have been changed by Christ.

In our gospel reading we saw a man who was changed by Christ. Before his encounter with Jesus, he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles, cast out of the community living in fear of him and living with the dead in the tombs. But then the man met Jesus, and ***when he saw Jesus, he fell down before him***. In his shout of ***what have you to do with me?*** We hear his hopelessness and his assumption that he's been permanently excluded from all that is right and good. But then Jesus engages with him personally, asking ***what is your name?***

And after his encounter with Jesus, when people ***came out to see what had happened***, and ***found the man ... sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind ... they were afraid***.

The man they believed ***had been possessed by demons had been healed***. In fact, the Greek word used to describe his changed condition also means saved, and it also means rescued, and it also means delivered. It signifies a once-for-all change.

How would we respond to such a turn-around in somebody's condition? What if suddenly there were no need for support groups, for hospitals, for the emergency services?

One day, our world will be renewed in that way, when Christ returns to his kingdom. But for Christians, that faith in that promise of renewal makes a difference to how we live in the here and now, because ***if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise and children of God through faith***.

God promised Abraham, the father of people of Israel, ***I will bless you, ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***. God's promise of blessing upon Abraham wasn't confined to Abraham's physical descendants, but was given to Abraham's spiritual descendants, to everybody who puts their faith in Jesus. It is a blessing that is for everybody, without distinction. Not to say that such distinctions do not exist, but that they do not matter to anybody who is in Christ, because if we are in Christ we regard each other as equals.

And so, baptised into Christ, we find ourselves related to God, who is our father, as we are his children. And related to our brothers and sisters in Christ, for as Paul says, ***all of you are one in Christ Jesus***. And related to all of God's people who have been in Christ, and who will be in Christ, throughout time and for all eternity. If we belong to Christ, we have the blessing of discovering our true identity in Christ. We know we too will return home, joyfully proclaiming how much God has done for us.

But for now, Christ changes us, one person at a time. And so it is cause for enormous rejoicing that we are baptising Mac today.