

Reflective Worship 3rd September

Living out Jesus' story

Philippians 3

Last weekend, Paul and I were at the Greenbelt Festival - an annual event rooted in the Christian tradition with activism and social justice as its main focus. Alongside which sit creativity, music, cake, conversation, and a safe space for those who are exploring who they are, and who God might be calling them to become. In many ways, it's like a little bit of heaven on earth – everyone looking out for each other, accepting each other, a giant family in the best possible way.

This year was Greenbelt's 50th anniversary. And like all families it has its traditions.

On Sunday morning we all come together to share communion – 20,000+ individuals worshipping together in bread and wine, words, hymns and songs, old and new

Around lunchtime on Saturday the “Jesus Arms” (Greenbelt's onsite – ahem – hostelry) hosts Beer and Hymns. Many hundreds – of people and pints - belting out classic hymns. Yes - having a great, lung-busting, liberating sing, but also reaffirming the beliefs which underpin people's lives.

And the final event – the OK Chorale – a massive karaoke of well known pop songs, as people gather together to share in Bohemian Rhapsody, Hey Jude, I would walk 500 miles and the like. Many decibels blasting out into the Northamptonshire skies, as once more we prepare to take all we have learned and experienced out to the everyday world.

Songs. They have a power beyond mere words and music. They take us back. Refocus and re-centre us. And they teach us. They burrow themselves down into our subconscious, take root, and feed us.

I suspect many of us know the words to that song we have just sung, in a way that we don't remember the words of the passage from which it's taken. It's kind of like a portable version – to carry around with us for reference, distilling out the key points of the chapter, and its overarching message – God in Jesus as the centre of our lives.

It tells Paul's story

Leaving behind all his 'advantages' – all things he'd placed his trust in before

Placing his trust entirely in Jesus

Following the path Jesus had set out for him – for the sake of others. Regardless of where it took him.

Knowing God's resurrection power in his own life

Looking forwards to the joy and celebration of life in the full presence of God.

If you're really nerdy – like me – you'll be interested to realise that this “Paul story” reflects the “Jesus story” set out in the beautiful “Christ hymn” which we looked at last time

Jesus' leaving behind all the advantages of who he is - becoming not just human, but a servant

Jesus' following the path set out for him – in his case leading to deep suffering for the sake of others

God's power - in raising Jesus from the dead

The outcome of Jesus completing the work he'd been given – joy in the resurrected life in the full presence of God.

Paul's own story in its own way reflects Jesus' story. In a sense, his whole life has become a living out of Jesus' story.

And he encourages the Philippians to do the same. To live their lives as a living out of Jesus story. Taking Jesus' story as their example.

And at this point I begin to feel uncomfortable, because I see both Jesus' story, and Paul's story, and the stories of many of the early Christians and I think – errr – there seems to be a lot of suffering and death and unpleasantness in all this and I'm really not sure that's "me", thank you very much.

But maybe that's not quite the point. I am a 21st century woman, living in a different culture, with different challenges, I have different gifts leading to a different calling.

God made me and loves me as the unique person that I am. The way I live out the Jesus story in my life is going to be unique to me in my setting. Given that feeding Christians to lions is largely outlawed in this country, it's unlikely to end up in quite that way. So maybe I need to worry less about what the ending of the story might be. And more about actually getting on and living it.

And because we are all unique individuals made and loved by God, the way each of us lives out the Jesus story in our own lives is going to be unique to us in our own setting. So I'm thinking this is something we each have to do for ourselves.

And maybe we use this shape of the Jesus story that Paul used, as headings to help us.

And maybe we do it now. In the safety of this place, enveloped in the Spirit of God, and with the support of others who are walking the same road. Knowing that we are all 'works in progress', that none of us has got it all sorted – even St Paul admits that! Knowing that God's love is unconditional and God's grace covers us. We don't seek to live out Jesus' story in our own lives to earn our place in heaven. We seek to do so in response to the love and grace we have received.

So, can I invite you to have a go. There's no need to share this with anyone - unless you want to, of course – it's purely between you and God.

If it's too hard, or too painful, then it's fine not to do it. Just listen to the music that will be playing, and bring your own thoughts and prayers to God in the space.

It is meant to be slightly challenging, but not to leave people in a bad place, so if something disturbs or distresses you then please don't leave without talking to one of us about it.

So here's the shape

"All I once held dear, built my life upon..."

What have I already set aside to move Jesus/God closer to the centre of my life?

"Now my heart's desire is to know you more..."

What do I still need to set aside to move Jesus/God closer to the centre of my life?

How can I deepen my relationship with Jesus/God?

"To become like you..."

What is the path Jesus/God is setting before me?

What does it look like for me to live my life for the sake of others?

"Oh to know the power of your risen life..."

How do I become more aware of God's power working in my life?

How do I become more aware of God's power working in the world?

How do I trust more in God's power? ("Let go, and let God"?)

"So with you to live, and never die"

Do I ever allow myself to think about heaven - the joy and celebration of Life in the full presence of God?

To finish

God of our lives

You are always calling us

To follow you into the future

Inviting us to new ventures, new challenges,

New ways to care

New ways to touch the hearts of all.

When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage

When we worry that we are not up to the task

Remind us that you would not call us

If you did not believe in us

When we get tired

Or feel disappointed with the way things are going

Remind us that you can bring change and hope

Out of the most difficult situations

God of our lives
We offer you our reflections and our emptiness
Our commitments and our fears
And we rest in your unconditional love
In your grace
And in your eternal Hope.