

**Time to Grow Up - 26.7.20 - A story of growing up..**

**Galatians 3.23-29 - sparks of hope..**



**Leaning in, to listen, learn and lament..**

I wonder what this scene depicts for you?? Three little children – with their school rucksacks looking towards their new school. It is the first day of primary school and they are facing towards the future, on the threshold of newness, of learning, growth, and change.

Notice too, that these three children are of different ethnicities and different gender, and maybe different social standing, but here they are walking towards their school together side by side.

This scene sparks hope – hope of the excitement of learning, of new beginnings, and of solidarity, growing up together.

Yet it is not so long ago that children of different ethnic backgrounds could not walk into the same school. American writer and theologian Frederic Buechner recalls the Governor of Arkansas Faubus – in 1957 - holding out against desegregation in the schools in Little Rock. He muses: “if President Eisenhower with all his enormous prestige had personally led a black child up the steps to where the authorities were blocking the school entrance, it might have been one of the great moments in history. It is heart-breaking to think of the opportunity missed. Nothing in American history is more tragic surely than the

relationship of the black and white races. Masters and slaves both were dehumanized.”

If only Eisenhower had had the vision and courage to challenge the mindset of his day he could have helped to make way for a new story. Instead, Little Rock schools were desegregated in the end by legal process and armed force, but it was done without a gesture of contrition, or compassion that might have captured the imagination of the world.

Paul, writing to the Galatians was also addressing the issue of segregation between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Jewish Christians were demanding that the non-Jewish Christians be circumcised in order to fully belong to their church. Paul is arguing that belonging to God is no longer tied up with a set of laws. Now that Christ has come – we are children of God through faith in Christ.

Notice how many times Paul rams it home to the Galatians:

IN CHRIST, BAPTISED INTO CHRIST, CLOTHED WITH CHRIST, ONE IN CHRIST, BELONGING TO CHRIST... 5 times in three short verses..

This is our identity above all other identity markers, be it family, clan, tribe, such as the sports or music or other fads that unite us and separate us out.. I am a Christian who happens to be British. I am a Christian who happens to be a fan of cycling.. and so forth - Above all I am IN CHRIST..

As Christians – we have a platform from which to challenge all forms of segregation in our church communities – WE are all ONE IN CHRIST – the distinctions do not exclude anyone – or put anyone above another - neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor Male and female.. we are ONE in Christ. This does not take away our uniqueness, but does not allow us to segregate on the basis of other distinctions.

So how has the Church got it SO wrong – with texts like Galatians Chapter 3 to shape the body of Christ?? How has the Church copied culture and society in the ways of segregation – when we stand as equals IN Christ and as children of God through faith??

Funke – in her Every Day faith story – recently referred to two viruses of our time.

The first has been Covid 19 – which has exposed the gaping inequalities in our societies. The virus has generally speaking hit the less privileged much harder, while those who are economically and socially better off have been less affected.

Secondly, the virus of racism has been tragically exposed, revealing gaping disparities in society – deeply embedded in our social fabric and structures, in our education, places of work and all institutions including the Church.

Mark Vroekup, a white American pastor has recently written a book entitled “Weep with me” recounting his journey into understanding something of the depth of segregation and racial injustice. As he listened to his African American friends he realised how little he understood the racism all around him – and it led him into lament. Lament, he argues can help build bridges in our broken world.

Mark Vroekup urges Christians to LEAN IN to these inequalities, as children of God IN CHRIST – rather than shying away because it is too uncomfortable. But this listening and learning needs to take place, where possible, in trusting relationships with one another. Oregon “White people cannot understand completely, but they are trying to empathise – and that’s a beginning.”

I was reminded, as I prepared this sermon, of a conversation I had with Calen – our African American youth worker for five years. We were in the car and it seemed like a police car was following us. He made a passing comment that has stayed with me and shocked me at the time: If the police were following me in a car in the US, I would never head home – but would drive to a public place for safety. I contacted him to ask if I could share this story – he said yes – and then commented that his parents, living in Minneapolis, had their home egged this last week – the only house in the street – the only one with blacks living there. His father texted “My soul gets tired.” I regret that I did not have more conversations with Calen leaning in to understand and to lament with him.. not just to ring my hands in despair – but to build bridges of empathy and solidarity and protest.. that things can be different – in the name of Christ.

Let’s go back to our picture of the children on their first day of school – fearful maybe but looking towards the future, hungry to learn, full of wonder. Maybe our hope – in the face of these complex questions of inequality – is to be humbled before God, to remember that we need to be like children – knowing our need for God in our limitations and brokenness.

As children of God, IN CHRIST, we ask for God's grace and wisdom and courage to lean into the realities of prejudices and racism within us and around us. We pray for God's grace to direct our hearts to listen carefully to the other, to learn and to lament and together to grow up in Christ. That is where we will discover sparks of hope for our time.

### **References – The Ghost Ship**

**“Weep with me” Mark Vroekup**

**Podcast from Funke / plus books from Helen Harding..**

Apart from the obvious reason of eye-watering pain for grown Gentile men (!)asking them to be circumcised as a requirement for being a Christian was stepping back into the Old Testament Law. Paul explains that the Law was like a guardian employed to look after the young male members of a Roman household, until they were grown up. Once they had reached maturity, they no longer needed a guardian. In the same way, the Jewish Laws and way of life was there to guide the people of God until Christ came. Salvation is now founded on faith in Jesus Christ – this is the new identity marker.

Funke – in her story says “It is not enough to NOT be racist – we have to be ANTI-racist.