**Sermon: Connecting in Christ**

**Readings:** Colossians 2: 6-15 & Luke 11:1-13

Much of our being part of a church is an attempt to try to connect in the right ways – how to connect to our communities, how to connect to each other, how to connect to our culture, how to connect to scripture and ultimately, how to connect to God. And in our readings today, we find two central teachings concerning what we ought to connect to and how we should do this in our Christian lives.

The section that we heard from Paul’s letter to the Colossians contains two verses which sum up the central message of the entire letter. And that is to connect in Christ before all else…

*6 You have accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord. Now keep on following him. 7 Plant your roots in Christ and let him be the foundation for your life. Be strong in your faith, just as you were taught. And be grateful.*

For Paul, it’s not enough to simply identify as a Christian, but it is everything to be of Christ.

Paul was battling with a culture that was a fusion of Jewish legalism, Greek mysticism and various philosophies, all making claims on what it is to live a full and flourishing life and he was very concerned that such influences seemed to be perverting the gospel message.

The Jewish teachers emphasised the need for strict adherence to the law if one was to be made right with God – eating the right foods, observing festivals and the rite of circumcision etc.; the “mystics”, sought to distance themselves from the world, avoiding corruption, and focusing only on the spiritual realm; and the philosophers placed reason above all else as the foundation for truth.

And out of this mix, there was emerging a strand of Christian teaching that stressed the need for humans to earn or think their way to salvation, along with a sense of distain for the world around us.

Paul’s response is a simple one – place Jesus at the heart of everything, make your roots and foundations of Christ, trust in Him alone and be formed and informed out of this experience.

Paul wanted his audience to understand that the way to relationship with God and wholeness in life has been freely given to all through God’s Grace in Jesus. And this has implications, not just for the world to come, but for this life, for this world. If we follow Jesus we will be brought into God’s presence; if we follow Jesus we will bring God’s kingdom into the here and now, transforming this world, whilst also making us fit for Heaven.

To the rational mind, such claims can seem far-fetched, but a life of faith doesn’t start with reason. This is a very difficult truth to sell to a world that has often made a god out of the human intellect, but it is a truth that has been realised by millions of very rational and reasonable people who have trusted enough to take a leap of faith.

The philosopher, Plotinus is quoted as saying “You can only apprehend the Infinite by a faculty that is superior to reason”. He is hinting at an important truth here – that we can only connect with God through what is of God – we can only connect with what He has placed of Himself in us, something we do not exercise control over, something that is released through faith.

So, what does this mean for us? How do we plant our roots or make our foundations in Christ? What do we use to connect with God? How can we apprehend the Infinite?

Obviously, the challenges that we face in our age will differ to some extent from what Paul was setting out before the Colossians. There aren’t too many people encouraging us to follow food laws, or to turn our backs on physical reality or to debate the finer points of rationalism, but there are many voices that attempt to define “fullness” of life in ways that are clearly finite, superficial and exclusive. Just think Hello magazine, Love Island and Trump’s American Dream.

The truth is that in any age there have been and will be so many things to distract us from what God wants from and for us. And this is why the image of Christ is so important to us – God in human form, the one whom we can trust to know what is infinitely good for us.

And this is perhaps where our Gospel reading has particular resonance. In Luke’s Gospel we heard Jesus instructing the disciples on how to pray - teaching them what we now know as “the Lord’s Prayer”. The Catholic Church has long taught that this prayer is a summary of the whole gospel and that if we follow its precepts then we will walk in the way of Jesus.

So many people have been blessed by this prayer and I have found that it is often what people want to hear at difficult times and especially at the end of life. When we follow in the ways it sets out – honouring God, depending on God, committing to do His works here on earth, forgiving and asking to be forgiven - then we allow God to work in us and we make wholeness possible.

The prayer is not a rational equation, it cannot be demonstrated from a distance, but it is something that we are all invited to personally and intimately try for ourselves. It represents a way of life and it offers the rootedness and foundation that Paul identifies - connect in Jesus, follow in the ways of love and receive the fullness of God. Amen