

Today's reading were from:  
Matthew: 4 v1-11  
Galatians: 3 v23-29

## Knowing your place (under grace)

This is a slightly unusual title for a talk - but I hope it'll make sense once we have reached the conclusion!

Over the past few weeks we have begun a discipleship course looking at six interrelating themes and have so far looked at three; our closeness or intimacy with God, the way he can use that to affirm us and then through affirmation how we can learn about our identity as sons and daughters in God's family. In today's talk I'm hoping we can unpick how our identity as children of God can develop an authority in our faith lives and beyond.

With that in mind perhaps it's not surprising that our readings are firstly centred on an example where Jesus uses his identity to assert authority over the devil. In the second reading we learn of the Galatians who haven't quite mastered how their identity as believers in Jesus, means that their salvation is secure rather than needing to be earned by following the rules of the Law.

If the question was posed to us "what is your identity?" I wonder what your reply might be? My passport would certainly tell you something, my nationality, my age, my place of birth and perhaps even some of the places I have visited. Those of us who are old enough to remember Tony Blair's premiership may remember his wife being asked a similar question on a visit to a church. I don't know whether she was primed but Cherie Blair identified herself firstly as a Christian, secondly as a wife and thirdly as a mother. On reflection, as a busy QC she might have added a fourth category as an employee.

Perhaps it is significant that prior to Jesus' temptation, his baptism in the Jordan by John took place. As Jesus comes out of the water, the spirit of God descends on him and God is heard to affirm Jesus' identity with the words "this is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased". And which one of us wouldn't want God to be able to say the same of us?! With that assurance of his identity and affirmation, Jesus is led into the desert where he fasts for 40 days and nights. At the end of this time without nourishment Jesus must have been physically weak and yet he was absolutely alive to the spiritual tools available to him.

Jesus uses his knowledge of scripture to rebuff the devil's tricks. In the first temptation Jesus has no requirement to prove he is God's son, he knows it; in the second he has no need to test his father's love for him, he is sure of it and secure in his position as God's beloved son; in the third he has no need to accept the devil's offer of 'gifts' as he knows God's provision for him is absolutely sufficient. God is the 'El Shaddai' which literally translates as 'the enough'.

So where and how do the Galatians get it wrong? They certainly receive a stinging rebuke from the Apostle Paul at the beginning of his letter to them "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace

of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all!". You really can hear Paul's utter exasperation!

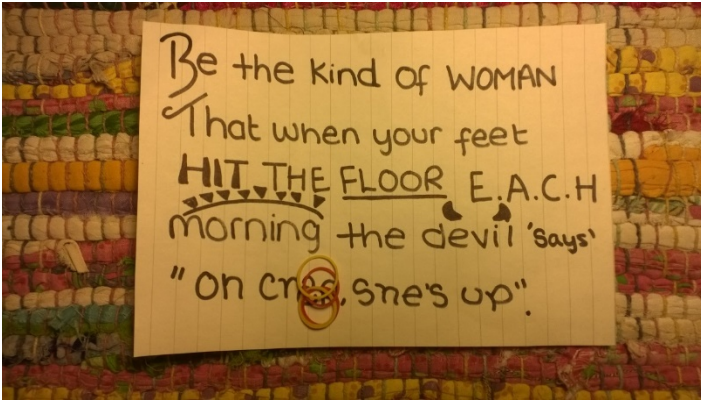
The Galatians had not been able to accept that God's promise to Abraham and the Law which was instituted some 430 years later, pointed to a new a covenant which fulfilled but absolutely superseded the old. They were trying to blend the requirements of the law with faith in Jesus so as to try and earn their salvation and God's love. They were wanting, as perhaps we are all prone to do, to try to live by a set of absolute rules even though they knew from their history that they could not succeed. They hadn't understood grace. Maybe our current day equivalent might be 'there's no such things as a free lunch' or 'you don't get something for nothing'. But with grace, it is rather more like going out for a sumptuous meal at a very upmarket restaurant which, once you are seated, the restaurant owner greets you saying, "all you had to do friend, was to come.... The bills on me". Paul is absolutely clear, faith in God's son leads to our adoption into God's family as his sons and daughters, his dearly loved children. Sometimes we just don't take hold of this thinking that there's more we must do to earn the privilege. He says, "in Christ Jesus you are children of God through faith" and in verse 28 we are led to understand it doesn't matter who we are or what we have been or where we have come from, we can all be children of God. Grace cannot be earned, it is freely given to those who believe, its unmerited and undeserved. In fact, its priceless.

God really does love us, warts and all and He's desperate that we accept this so that we can be clear of our identity and our place as members of his family along with the rights and responsibilities that come with this.

At this stage, it's also worth exploring just what it meant to be part a family or indeed adopted into a family in the early part of the first century. It really does add context to what is being said. When a father determined that his heir had reached a point of maturity to be able take on responsibility for family matters and business there would be special ceremony and probably a very good party.

The rights and responsibilities conferred would enable the heir to access all the rights, power and privileges of the parent. Where this ceremony related to a child born outside of the family, their old life was set aside and they became co-heirs with any other offspring. Just as significant was that the heir was legally authorised to conduct the father's business. The father's affirmation empowered the heir to act on his behalf and echoes what God said to Jesus at his baptism "this is my son, whom I love and with him I am well pleased". And with our adoption so comes a commissioning into the Father's business, He makes His authority and power available to us, He trusts us to get on with His work as missionaries in His world. As His children, He knows we'll make mistakes, that's part of any learning journey as we're apprenticed into 'the business'. God call us to be with him, to be sure of our relationship and then to go and 'do'.

When we're sure and confident here, the devil has a lot to worry about! As a mum, I'm sometimes struck by the profound statements that appear on my



daughter's bedroom wall. You'll have to forgive the gritty use of language but this is a small poster that's been on her wall for a couple of years:

I think she's got that right on!

With all this in mind it shouldn't come as a great surprise that in becoming God's children, knowing

that we are saved and that even the devil's clever antics can't stop us from going to heaven (John 10:28 provides reassurance here) he changes tack. The devil will do his utmost to make us as ineffective as possible to prevent us from helping anyone else find their way to heaven.



For Our lives are a bit like this chunk of wood, there are a few cracks and weaknesses and the devil will aim for those. He will try to enhance our insecurities, our fear of failure, our perceived imperfections in an attempt to limit God's plans for our lives. In every situation, we need to be secure in our relationship with God just as Jesus was when he was tempted. When we identify ourselves as God's children we are well placed to repel those attacks and temptations, reassured that God will still love us even if we do make mistakes and confident that he wants us to be whole. This maximises our ability to weather the inevitable storms of life

In summary, as children of God we are restored to a close and loving relationship with Him but are also commissioned to go out into the world with the full authority of sons and daughters of the living God.

So, a final thought to leave you with. What can we do to grow as both individuals and as a fellowship in our identity as God's dearly loved family and where is he calling us again both individually and collectively to exercise God given authority?

Amen

2 Timothy 1 v7

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, of love and of self-discipline.

1 Corinthians 15 v58

Therefore.... Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.