

Sermon preached by Louis Bezuidenhout in Inveraray 6 September 2009

Reading: Psalm 18:1-30 (selected verses); Matthew 28:16-20; Philippians 3:10-13; 4:12-13

Psalm 18:1-50 ... I love you, O LORD, my strength. (2) The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (3) I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. (4) The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; (5) the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. (6) In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears...

(16) He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters...

(28) For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness. (29) For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. (30) This God--his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him...

Matthew 28:16-20 (16) Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. (17) And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. (18) And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Philippians 3:10-13 All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, (11) in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life. (12) I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself. (13) Of course, my friends, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead.

Philippians 4:12-13 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Address

Philippians 3:10-13 All I want is to know Christ and to

experience the power of his resurrection

Last week I went to see an old friend. Long ago, when we stayed in Scotland for the first time, he was our neighbour. He introduced us to the music of Moira Anderson, the books of Angus McVicar, Scottish traditions, prejudices, even eating pheasant, rabbit and whelks (I did not acquire a taste for the last two dishes). Most importantly, we got to know him as a friend, he meant a lot to us as a family. We have kept contact during the years we went back to South Africa again and it was a happy reunion when we eventually came to settle permanently in Scotland. His friendship helped us to settle and feel at home in Scotland. I went to see him last week because his health is failing rapidly. I wanted to thank him for his friendship while I still have the opportunity.

We all may know people who have made an impact on our lives. Not celebrities, movers and shakers, but people whom we really know, whose friendship has helped us to grow, giving us strength.

Jesus was such a person. In his time there were different reactions to his ministry - he was not popular among the wider public - there is very little information in historical documents about the person of Jesus. However, when you read documents written by those who knew him personally, it is a different story.

He has touched the lives of people and made a great impact. A good example is Peter - he was not a strong person - there was a time when he even denied that he knew Jesus. Yet, Jesus said to him:

Luk 22:(32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail. And when you turn back to me, you must strengthen your brothers."

Through the power of his friendship with Jesus, he became the leader of the church

Paul, who wrote many letters contained in our Bible was a person who persecuted the church after the time of Jesus. He had a high standing in religious circles. Although he never met Jesus, after the death of Jesus he did have a spiritual experience - an encounter with the risen Jesus. He was able to get to know him.

The concept 'the risen Jesus' is hard to understand. Somehow Jesus is still with us. Somehow he can still be known. He made this promise: I will be with you until the end of the age.

When we celebrate communion, we have to know that Communion is not only an act of remembrance, but also

fellowship with the risen Christ. Although we cannot understand it, we can still experience the power of the love of Christ.

To Paul it was a life changing experience. Things that were important to him, became trivial. Phi 3:10-13 All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, (11) in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life.

The journey with Jesus is not easy, it leads through dark valleys. Yet, even in the darkness He makes my lamp shine brightly, he brings light into my darkness. There are barriers, obstacles, on the way, yet we can leap over the wall.

Knowing Jesus brings courage and inner strength:
Phi 4:12-13 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. (13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

We are the church of the risen Christ. May we confess with Paul: I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

To us, faith is more than tradition, more than historical interest, more than sentiment. May this church be the place where we get to know the living Christ, where we experience the power of his resurrection. Amen.