

Deep Psychology (Phil 3:17-4:1)

10:00am Holy Communion – Sunday 16th March 2025

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me, “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.”’

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

<Prayer>

The medical subject of psychology has become a very popular over the last twenty years or so. All three of my teenage children were given the opportunity to study it at secondary level. Right alongside that are studies in Social Science, Citizenship and Personal Development. Many of these aim towards careers in the community, which is a good thing in my book. I only wish that back in the early 1980s such appealing subjects had been available to me. The more time I spend working with society, in all its funny ways, the more I find the human race to be a subject of enduring curiosity.

People watching has become an interest of mine. Partly because I want to have influence in our neighbourhoods through the mission of the church. **As you might expect, I try to spread a bit of godly love and have those doors of welcome open to people.** The first part of that is to try to be accessible myself. My personal phone number is on the parish website, and I try to be diligent in answering all my email each day. On the parish website there remains a smiling picture of me with the words *'I am the Rector Revd Chris Bessant, local, accessible and very friendly!'* **Admittedly, it's an old photograph, but I do want people to think I still look that young.**

In St Paul's letter to the Philippians, which was our first reading, Paul addresses those to whom he writes as if they were indeed his own family. **'Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.'** **What makes that true is that God is a father for all of us.** A great doctrine of the Christian faith is that we can have a personal connection with God, he is accessible to us like a member of the family. **He is *Our Father*.....as we address him in prayer, and as Jesus taught us to do.**

Back to my being an amateur psychologist again, there is, it seems to me, a place within our conscious and subconscious thinking, which might be thought of as the place of faith. If we seek to have God in our lives, then

that is where He may be found – **deep down inside us in a living place which from there defines our lives as Christians.** That same place is the cherished point for all our other most special loves and cares – the absolute centre of our being. It’s also the same heart where everything else which is special to us is to be found – the purpose of our lives, our families, our hopes, our failures and regrets, our memories of those we have loved but no longer see. If God is in close proximity to all of that, then our prayers for the things we care most for, are a bit like stepping into the next room of our house and finding that God is that close and accessible.

So, this place within us is deep, but it is not inaccessible nor impenetrable, and it can be influenced. This season Lent is the best time this year for a bit of self-examination, and that can be us looking inward to the deepest places. **Surely God is the primary shaping influence in our lives, otherwise he is a mere recreational interest.** We have been the given good-news, our faith, as an example in Christ of love and joy, and the rock of Almighty God to grasp onto in the difficult times of our lives, such as we have each had at different times. We have not been left alone to make up our lives from nothing. **We can have the truth of God in our hearts to guide us, shape us and uphold us. If we look inside our lives, like personal psychologists, we should want to see God deep down in there.**

I would like to draw your attention back to the epistle reading we heard **Wendy** read today. As I’ve already mentioned, this is Paul’s letter to the Philippians, and it fits very well into Lent because it is a reading that challenges us to self-examination, even though we are so very far distant from the place and times of St Paul. Allow me to elaborate a little.

Paul is in prison somewhere, along with some companions. From there they are making a connection by letter, to send God’s love and influence directly into hearts and minds of those who are far distant from them.

Here is that open line again: ‘[Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us](#)’. If you look at the reading printed in the Sunday notes sheet, you can see more of his words.

In what he writes, Paul is making a very clear distinction between two groups of people: those whose ‘[destiny is destruction](#)’ and those who have ‘[our citizenship in heaven](#)’. These kinds of distinctions are not uncommon in scripture. Jesus said many similar things such as ‘*take this road and not that road, go through this gate not that gate.*’ It’s even more stark in the Old Testament because the Law given to Moses proscribes *hundreds* of laws and statues that say **don’t do it this way – do it that way.**

It isn’t difficult to discover how Paul identifies the opposites he sees. On the one hand there are those who live their lives as he and his companions have been showing them. This is the way of God, the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. Contained with that example is the goodness that God has taught, the love he has shown, the salvation he has provided, the truth he has revealed - lived accordingly, from deep down inside you. That is how Paul is himself – we can be too.

Yet on the other hand Paul writes about those who are called ‘[enemies of the Cross of Christ](#)’, and these people are very different. **Who wants to be thought of as that?** We must bear in mind that Paul is writing a letter of instruction and encouragement to a fledgling church. These enemies are not necessarily pagans trying to persecute the church, but rather more worryingly they are members of the **same church** who are living according to a different and erroneous version of the **truth**. Oh dear.

Theory has is that these individuals were claiming that salvation is not to be found at the cross, because they could not accept the idea that God would choose to die upon the cross, which is the same as to say *God didn’t die for me*. Their expectation was that God **Almighty would smite his enemies in order to defeat evil, so God becomes a handy solution to**

what they really want for themselves. Their Messiah was to be a warrior, not a sacrificial lamb. Paul exposes them by their real intentions: **'their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things.'** **Deep down, the psychology of their faith is all wrong.**

These are the characters for whom people and society is material for manipulation, not for care, or charged for good, or serving responsibly. **They may be such vain hedonists that they even think they can make a deal later with God. Yet God will place a heavy tariff upon their lives.**

These are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and it's very strong language, perhaps they had not accepted the truth and were living in error – they still do - **and as a result it can be seen in their behaviour.**

I wonder if you can think of such people.....I can.

But as Christians we have not been left without good examples and those worth imitating. We do recognize that the teaching of Christ and the love of God are an influence upon what we decide to do, and there are those who can show us the better way. All of this is accessible to use, almost as if we can just pick up the phone and God will answer. **We have a ready deposit of truth, we have not been left alone.**

Lent again draws us to examine whether that truth lies within us – whether we have sought it and maintained it. And the question to ask yourself again is: **'Christ in the deepest parts of my life, working through me.'**

Lent is the right time to seek that. Continue in these next weeks to seek God's truth and his message – for the full depth of our life. Write it onto your hearts and allow it to enrich your lives.

And when you do, so the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your **hearts and your minds** in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen