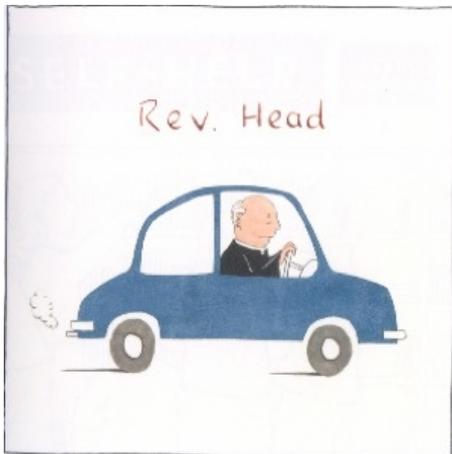


To God's Holy People

Colossians 1:9-20

During the week Ross Gittins, the Age's Economics editor, wrote an article entitled: "Why some jobs are more satisfying than others." It was based on research published in 2014 by the British Cabinet Office which examined the life satisfaction of people working in 274 occupations. I was pleased to find that the top occupation was clergy. Some of the others in the top 10 were chief executives, farm managers, company secretaries, farmers, and doctors.



Gittins commented: "From a quick squiz, it seems the most satisfying jobs tend to be better paid than the least satisfying. (With clergy as an obvious exception. If my dad's pay was any guide, revs aren't rolling in it.)" He also noted that the most satisfying jobs were those where "people treat you with respect... there's a sense that you've achieved something... a degree of complexity and variety... and present you with a challenge."

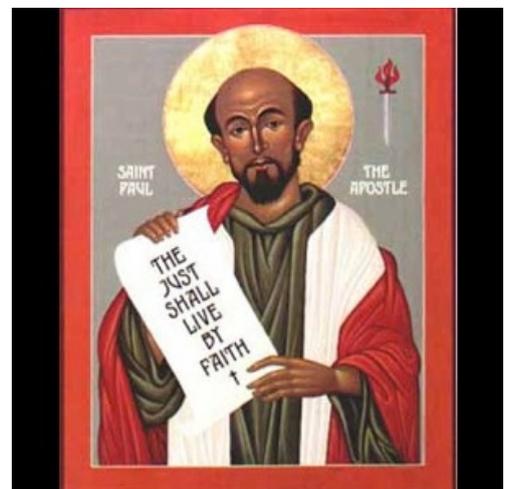


As I look back on almost a decade of serving as senior pastor at St Paul's, I can agree with his observations, and found them to be true of my work here. You, the people of God I've been

called to serve, have shown me respect, even before I had earned it. You received me as your pastor and honoured me by allowing me to bring the word of God to you, in worship, in meetings, in conversations and pastoral care. You've provided the environment in which I have learnt so much and have been stretched beyond what I thought I had the capacity to do. I have never been bored because St Paul's is such a fascinating place, with so many gifted people, and so many opportunities to serve. Nor have I ever lacked challenge: there have been so many new and exciting developments as St Paul's has sought to be responsive to God's call for us.

Our founders chose to name this congregation St Paul's. This name binds us to following in the footsteps and the teaching of the Apostle Paul. And he himself was one who followed in the power and example of Jesus, in a most remarkable and dramatic way. Paul was a person in whose life grace was writ as large as you could possibly imagine, and who was the most passionate teacher and proclaimer of the gospel.

I'm a huge fan of Paul's letters. I have always loved the epistles, because they are both deep reflection on God's being and love, at the same time calling God's people to a life of faith active in love. This is what resonates with me.

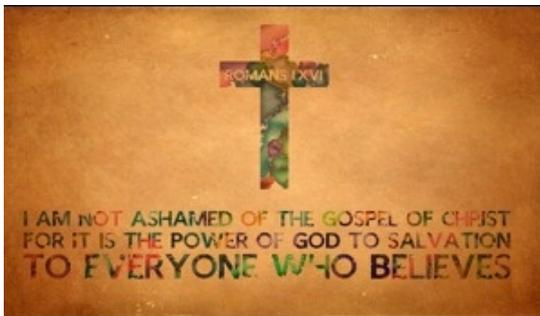
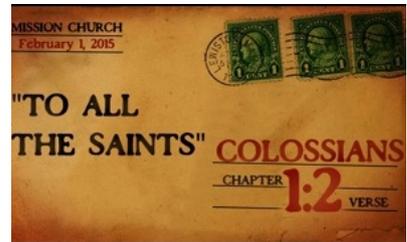


I love ideas but I love even more when they are birthed into action. I have been so excited when ministry initiatives take flight through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Over the last ten years we have prayed together, imagined, planned, and enacted many ministry initiatives: in worship, in Connect ministry, child, youth and family, in serving our community. God has been working on us, and in us, and through us. The birth of the Mandarin mission here at St Paul's happened like that. From a hope that we could serve our surrounding community, God, through the LCA Board for Mission, presented us with the opportunity to partner with the Chinese Lutheran Church Victoria, in planting a Mandarin congregation here. God is so gracious and faithful!

I particularly love the way Paul begins his many letters. Let me address you, as Paul does the church in Colossae: "To God's holy people in Box Hill, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ". It's critical that we begin with identity. The key question in our culture today is: What is a human being? Identity has become increasingly fluid and malleable. We have to work to establish who we are, where we have come from, what we stand for, where we are heading.

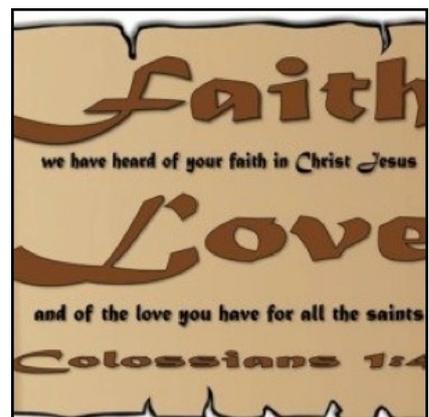
But hear who you are. You are God's saints. You, together with all the human race, have been created in the image of God. You are no accident, no product of random chance or endless mutations. Yes, you, like all other people, bear the brokenness that comes from the fall. But you are not stuck there. You have been chosen by God's grace to be his servants, through his Son, Jesus Christ. "In Jesus the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."



My experience in serving you is that I have nothing to share, and no power to share it, unless I proclaim Christ and his crucified. The Holy Spirit lifts high Jesus and the good news of his life, death and resurrection. I am more convinced than ever, in the words of my ordination text, that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

I feel about St Paul's what Paul felt about

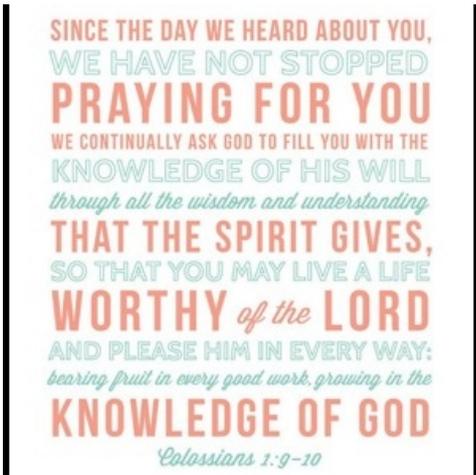
the Christians in Colossae. "We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints..." What Paul has heard of: the good new bearing fruit have seen in you, received from you, and seen you express these qualities in the lives of others. I've seen God at work in and through you, through conversion, faithful love and hidden service, courage in suffering, wrestling with doubt. I've seen God's grace wear down hard hearts, offer hope to people who have fallen away, awaken love, unlock gifts.



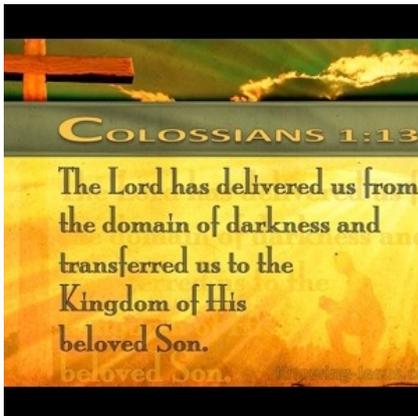
There are times when the opposite has been true, too, for me and for you. There are time when we have failed God, when we've allowed pride, irritation, fear to have its way. I am so humbled, week after week, by the responsibility to announcing to you the forgiveness won by Jesus through his cross, and then serving you at the Lord's Table with the body and blood of our Saviour. This is a time of great tenderness for me, and prayerful reflection on the circumstances of your lives as you come forward. Sometimes there has been sadness too, as I've

thought of those who no longer join us at table. The family is not complete when there are empty spaces.

I know some of the reasons why. Life is over busy, complex, demanding and wearying. We need God's constant help to flourish as his people. My prayer for you has been Paul's prayer today: "that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." This has two dimensions — knowing God's general will through dwelling in his Word, and knowing his particular will for a given situation, by praying on the basis of his word, listening to the Spirit, receiving counsel from one another. I'm so pleased at the increasing focus on prayer, not just in our worship, but after services, in our Tuesday morning prayer group, in strategic prayer for the big questions about our future, the call to pray and fast in the lead-up to last week's Special General Meeting.



We worship, read Scripture and pray so that we radiate the presence of God, in lives that draw attention to the God who lives in us: "May you lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and you grow in the knowledge of God." Paul's letter show us that Christian faith is eminently practical. It consists of loving in the pattern and example of Jesus. It calls for humility, simplicity, integrity, honesty, for the fruits of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."



This is the last Sunday of the church year. The cross of Jesus breaks into our pre-Christmas preparations. The calendar of the church is different. We stand on the edge of a new year, looking back to the cross, through which we have been "rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light," and looking forward to the renewal of the whole creation when Jesus returns as King for all to see. Our commission is to live creatively, hopefully as people of the light.

Today I would like St Paul to have the last word to St Paul's. It is my prayer for you all,

and for me and my family too, as we step into an exciting, unfolding future:

"We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul — not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us." (Colossians 1:11,12-The Message)

