

***I can't believe.....!***

*Genesis 18<sup>1-10</sup>; Psalm 15; Colossians 1<sup>15-28</sup>; Luke 10<sup>38-end</sup>*

*Christ in you, the hope of glory. [Colossians 1<sup>27</sup>]*

The joke at the end of each episode of *The Vicar of Dibley* was sometimes the best bit of the programme. One of my favourites was when Geraldine asks Alice if she has heard of the new low-fat communion bread, 'I can't believe it's not Jesus'?

That is what all Christians should aim for – that people look at us and say, 'I can't believe it's not Jesus'! As Jesus is **the image of the invisible God**, we are to be the image of the visible Jesus. But in reality are we like Paul, Sarah or are we like Martha?

Paul is positive and says that he is now **rejoicing in [his] sufferings**.

Just two verses beyond where our OT reading ends, it records that **Sarah laughed to herself**, not accepting that at the age of 99 she and Abraham would have a child.

Martha complains to Jesus that her sister Mary was listening to what he said and has **left me to do all the work by myself. Tell her to help me**.

In truth, we probably fluctuate between them all.

What we should not miss from the readings today – and there is a lot in them: Abraham's hospitality to the Trinity(?) is legendary and I always wondered at how long they stayed if they had time to cook a calf, leading to the promise of Isaac whether Sarah believed it or not; to the Psalm where there is so much practical advice on how to live a good life; to Martha and Mary also offering hospitality and involving Jesus in the very real humanity of their home – is the towering theology of Colossians 1 and what it teaches about the Jesus we should be more like.

- ✘ Jesus is the **image of the invisible God** and he is the **fullness of God**. The theology of our faith and the key element in our proclamation is that Jesus is God. He created all things and his is the glue that holds this whole

created order together. He is the **head of his body the Church**; he is the **firstborn from the dead**; he is the means of God being **pleased to reconcile to himself all things** which he did by **making peace through the blood of his cross**.

- ✘ When Paul says **and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church**, he is not saying that Jesus didn't do enough on the cross, leading to that heresy that we have some part in achieving our salvation. He is saying that he knows that he has work to do to become the man, the minister, that God calls him to be. That, I am sure, is something we can all connect with. We never move away from that simple Gospel that is **Christ in you, the hope of glory!** His commission is **to make God fully known** and to begin to do that he had to become the Apostle to the Gentiles, which was certainly not where he started!
- ✘ Having presented Jesus as God and recognising that he isn't the finished product yet, he still says that his task and the task of the Church is to **present everyone mature in Christ**. When the history books are written for this chapter of the life of St Mary's it will be clear that, together, we have achieved a great deal, not least in the buildings and in building positive relations with the community. But how will I and we be judged on this criteria, of **maturity in Christ?**

Being Rector of Handsworth has often been like being a single parent of a dysfunctional family with all the stress and fun that this involves. I now feel like that parent leaving teenage children in the house alone whilst going on holiday! That is why maturity in Christ is so vital.

So are we Paul, or Sarah or Martha? Positive, sceptical or complaining?