

## Sermon for February 9<sup>th</sup> –10.00 service: Mainly 1Cor 2.1-12(13-16)

“Spiritual” means different things to people. People say, “I’m not religious but I am spiritual”, which I think means that they feel that there is more to the World than what we can see and measure. That there is “something beyond” ... I agree, but not always with what follows.

To Isaiah’s people “spiritual” was “Getting liturgy right”. Leviticus has quite detailed rules. Fasting and sacrifice mattered.

God talked to people in terms of their understanding. He accommodated them and then taught them. Sacrifice was important to them so He took it and used it to educate them

Strict attention to liturgy wasn’t wrong. Making it an end in itself, divorced from the rest of life, was. Through Isaiah, God educated them:

*“The kind of fasting you do won't get your prayers off the ground.*

*Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after:*

*A day to show off humility?*

*To put on a pious long face and parade around solemnly in black?*

*Do you call that fasting, a fast day that I, God, would like?”*

*"This is the kind of fast day I'm after:*

*to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts.*

*What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families.”*

*(The Message)*

Showing God’s love and ensuring His justice matter more than ritual and shows of piety.

In Paul’s letter the difference between what is truly spiritual and what is regarded as “spiritual” is clearly highlighted

Like most of Paul’s letters, we need some background:

Corinth was a bustling, commercial sea port. Corinthians were enterprising, self-made people. Many of their values chime with our Society’s . Status was gained through material success and personal charisma. It was exciting: alive with ideas and experiences from all over the World. Greek thought permeated their thinking, as it does ours.

It was a brilliant place to found a Church. It needed one and people passing through could “Catch Christianity” from it and “Spread the Word”.

But the Church’s thinking and behaviour was influenced by their culture, and not for the better. Some of their leaders had “spiritualised” the Gospel, re-interpreting it in terms of Greek philosophy and distorting it. Worst, they were claiming that this distortion was a deeper understanding of the Gospel. Imagine it:

*“Yes dear boy, we know about the crucifixion and resurrection but you have to realise that this is for simple folk, milk for the babies. The spiritual amongst us, have a deeper understanding. We know these are metaphors of a deeper truth. The material world that we live in isn’t the true creation. It’s just a shoddy copy, knocked off by a dodgy celestial workman. It is a prison for our spirits. They long to be free of it. But*

*we have knowledge that can help. If you want enlightenment then start with your body. Recognise its unimportance and the insignificance of what you do with it. It's the spiritual that really matters".*

... a long way from seeing the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit; Important enough to be saved and resurrected by God.

But they had skilled orators who could deliver this "Higher Christianity". It fitted in with the rest of society and that made life as a Christian more comfortable.

We see it today: You can become a success by telling people what they want to hear in an attractive and entertaining way.

### **Paul calls them back to basics:**

1. God's way of doing things is very different from the way we approach things.

2. God is **deliberately** doing things in a way that doesn't make sense to our reason. He is showing us the fallibility of our thinking and our world view.

To us His methods are non-sense; even offensive, because we are coming at things from the wrong perspective.

3. We need to accept that our ways of seeing and reasoning and acting are flawed. Then we need to turn around and look at things His way.

We will need help with that!

It's the reverse of "The Fall" story. We have ignored God's instructions, stopped trusting Him and instead trusted our own senses, emotions and reason. We see and do things OUR way

Think of the serpent's promise?:

*...when you take of the fruit of the tree (of the knowledge of good and evil), your eyes will be open, and you will be as gods, having knowledge of good and evil.*

And they ... saw that the tree was good for food, and a delight to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise ...

We behave as though we are gods: trusting and following our own feelings and reason. It feeds and nourishes our egos

*"We are the masters of our fate, we are the captains of our soul".*

From this stance it is easy to say:

"O.K. God, if you want me to accept your Gospel then put it in terms that fit my world view. Show that it meets my tests and satisfies what I want from you."

And God says "You are going to have to trust me on this. Accept this relationship I am offering, live in it, and as you do things will start to make sense. Look at life through my eyes and it becomes perfectly reasonable, but in a different way".

The "Spiritual" leaders' reliance on impressive preaching to stir the emotions and clever thinking to tickle the reason is falling into the serpent's trap!

Paul by contrast has preached the naked gospel straightforwardly. He has relied on God, through prayer and obedience to the truth. He has preached that God, as a man, in a human body, died an agonising and humiliating human death. He has preached that somehow (he uses a number of analogies to help us understand ... none of which benefit from being stretched too far: sacrifice, substitution, ransom), somehow this messy, degrading spectacle has freed us from our futility and enabled God to re-establish a relationship with us, and to transform every bit of us, including, ultimately, our bodies. Jesus's resurrection is proof of this.

Viewed this way Jesus's broken body on the cross is a thing of transcendent beauty, an amazing gift of love. It shows that whatever the World may look like God is not indifferent. He, in His love for us, both asked and allowed His Son to do this.

True spirituality is accepting God's Good News, even though we don't understand it. It is living it, even though we won't have a clue where we are being led, and it is letting our relationship with God transform us and transform the way we see the World so that our perspective is in line with how God sees His creation. It is letting God, through His Spirit, form the "Mind of Christ" in us.

Amen

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