

**The JESUS we never knew x46. Sunday 12 November\_2017.**

**Read: 2 Corinthians 3.**

**Encountering Jesus.** AIM for this year and this theme: for each of us individually and together to become better friends with JESUS. (This is not presumptuous since Jesus himself has said “*I call you friends*” *John 15: 15* – disciples are those who love and obey Jesus). That is the real Jesus – not the Jesus of sentiment or others invention. Aim to know both the historical Jesus and to know Jesus experientially now. To do this we need to be able to spend time with him relating and this includes reading the Bible especially reading and meditating on the Gospels.

**(Sunday October 29<sup>th</sup>** when we were considering the special relationship of Jesus with the Father and the Spirit we said) ***John says that he wrote his Gospel (20:31) so that the readers would believe that Jesus of Nazareth was not just Messiah but also Son of God and that by having faith in him they might experience life. As this is his purpose it is not surprising that he includes this amazing conversation that Jesus has with the confused and challenged disciples Thomas and Philip. They are “worried and upset” because Jesus is “leaving them”. He describes his own relationship with the Father God in a way which at this stage in their thinking seems to confuse them further. Jesus acknowledges that they are going to need the help of God the Spirit to understand what he is trying to tell them. Here is what John records Jesus as saying:***

**Chapter 14 v9.** *He tells Philip “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”.*

*He also declares that he is IN the Father and the Father is IN him and that his words are not his own but are from the Father who is doing his own work. (The Father’s glory is shown through the Son).*

**Today we begin to consider how we may deepen that encounter with Jesus and so with the Father.** It is obviously going to involve commitment on our part – both investment of our time, our resolve and our very selves as we invest in the relationship. We surely cannot doubt God’s commitment to us since God loved us before we loved him (*Romans 5: 7 – 9*) and he has in Jesus shown the extent of his love – but as we are only human and full of fear and self we may doubt. But God has made the first move towards me – so let us dare to approach God.

Nevertheless, we remember **“God is an awesome God”** and although we approach Jesus because he has come to us in incarnation and invited us to “come to him” it is with a degree of not just openness but an awareness that he is calling the shots and we are **reliant upon him to reveal himself**. As Saul discovered on his Damascus Road encounter (**Acts 9**) this will not be according to our parameters and our predetermined wrong notions may be dispelled. Saul a Pharisee who lived his whole life based on what he thought were the teachings of the Mosaic Law discovered he had been resisting the Messiah sent by God. Paul came to believe when he wrote to the Colossians (1) that – *Jesus is the visible likeness of the invisible God 1: 15).*

The Jesus we never knew x46. Sunday 12 November\_2017. Encountering **Jesus**.

(1) Colossians written 50s AD; Acts written 80-90 AD and 2 Corinthians written 55 AD.

We have already mentioned the felt need we may have as humans to meet with Jesus and the things in our lives which will battle against this – not least our over busy lives. We need to make the time and space to settle down into Jesus and as we said a few weeks ago this can be like sitting in a comfortable arm chair feeling his arms around us.



My favourite seat...

In Jesus this may be a comfortable or even an unsettling experience.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth (2<sup>nd</sup> letter) when his relationship with them was strained. He was absent from them and declined to go and be with them although he had shared Jesus with them and planted their church. He had faced opposition and insults, but he stood up to those who opposed him. He writes to the church to make it plain that they are his letter of recommendation written about them on his heart and they are therefore bound together in Jesus Christ. He is not visiting them as he doesn't want to cause further distress because he loves them (2C2:4). He forgives the offenders and calls on the church to forgive them too.

2C2:17. Paul doesn't handle God's Message like cheap merchandise but rather speaks with sincerity and doesn't show off. **He speaks about Moses and the appearance of God's Glory and contrasts this with the unfading Glory of God's New Covenant in Jesus Christ.** When Moses came down from the mountain and after he went in to meet with God in the tent of Meeting (*Exodus 34: 29 – 35*) the Glory showing on his face only lasted a short while and then it faded but v11 there is a Glory that will last forever and will not fade – in the face of Jesus. Also in Jesus the "veil of closed minds" (v14) is removed when a person is "*joined to the Lord*" or "*turns to the Lord*" (This is Paul's terminology). *V17 Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.* Under the Law of Moses people are veiled or **mind closed** to the truth of God. *V16 When we "turn to the Lord" the veil is taken away.* Moses wore the veil so that the people could not see that the glory of his encounter with God was fading and be disappointed. Indeed, Paul is hinting strongly that the Old Covenant is fading and that the New Covenant glory is forever. In the New Covenant (v18) we ALL – have unveiled faces and are beholding the glory of God (in the face of Jesus) and are being changed by degrees – from glory to glory – by the Spirit of the Lord.

**By coming to Jesus (not just once) by turning towards Jesus (and away from the Law and shame) –** we gain understanding and the veil of misunderstanding is removed. In this new relationship we experience **metamorphosis or transformation** – we look as it were into a mirror and are changed to be more like Jesus. (grubs or caterpillars to butterflies: maturity – movement pollination from plant to plant). Coming to Jesus, turning towards Jesus, and transformation are Paul's constant themes and part of his own story. E.g. also used in *Romans 12: 1 and 2* the understanding of metamorphosis – the offering of our whole selves in sacrifice. The process of life long dying of self and being raised with Jesus. We are transformed in our minds to think in different ways.

**Encountering Jesus brings about change for the better.** Well it should do provided we desire to co-operate rather than resist the changes Jesus tells us he wants to make.

**Paul's own story told in Acts 9 of encountering Jesus was one of transformation: changed mind, heart and actions.** Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road - we know that he saw a bright light all around him and heard the voice of Jesus. (The one whose followers Saul had been persecuting). As a strict Pharisee whose life was based on the teaching of the Law of Moses it was an extreme shock to have the veil of his understanding removed. He later as we see described this experience as staring into the Glory of God in the face of Jesus. He was baptised but also disappeared into the desert for 3 years to reshape his whole way of thinking. That's what his encounter with Jesus did. He looked into the face of Jesus but also saw himself in a different light.

**2 Corinthians 3: 18** he argued that we **all** now can approach God with unveiled faces (as did only Moses before). We read the Law of Moses and the Old Covenant with unveiled minds and can understand the true nature of God and of God's plan. Like Paul we see that we could never truly keep the Law – there would always be failure because of our heart. (What we have in common with one another - our encounter with Jesus).

**The NT (and indeed the OT) is about encountering God. Jesus makes this possible.**

**We need God's grace to see and to hear Jesus: personal encounter in PRAYER.**

The experience of prayer including interior movements and responses to God's love, and the stirring of our affections and emotions is important. We seek in prayer to discern and know what God is affirming in us as pleasing but also to know the things that God is challenging about our attitudes and responses. We should want to choose well – according to the desires of God. There are others that we walk with as co-discerners: friends and co-workers, pastors, and spiritual directors or companions. Also, we have the Bible with is as God's revelation of truth. The biographies and numerous stories of notable saints of God are a great help in encountering God and discovering what is pleasing and possible.

**Encountering Jesus and repeated encounters with Jesus is what he desires.** We too can come to desire these encounters and greatly value them. Jesus has enabled all

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people's mind to be opened as we seek him – not just by intellectual reasoning but by supernatural intervention of God who wants to be known. *The Law came through Moses. Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ (John 1:17)*. We encounter God not just in creation, creative arts and music, other people but deeply as we meet with Jesus. In this the lifelong transformation of our lives can truly happen by the Spirit.