

Acts 21:27-36
Feilding Baptist
1.6.25

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

Ascension Day was on Thursday, so now we prepare for Pentecost next Sunday. Our two verses to start today, Romans 8:26-27

Romans 8

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Father God, thank you for this time to freely come and worship. Thank you for your interest in us, for sending the Holy Spirit to help us. Thank you for the Spirit's passion for the best for us. Thank you for Jesus, for the grace that has been shown us. May we recognise afresh, what has been done for us. Amen.

Message - Bringing About Change

Jesus came to bring change, to bring light, how are we adopting and buying into this? Or for resisting change.

"It's just the way I am!" This is usually said at a time of frustration, and usually in defence of ourselves. And you may have heard this, or may have said it. Is it true though, that the behaviours that we are trying to excuse, are excusable? That whatever we have done, is out of our control? Because what we've done is just who we are?

'It's just the way I am' could be an excuse for laziness? That actually, the behaviour I'm in trouble over, is just the way I choose to be, so the rest of you need to get over yourselves. Change is not necessary, or is too hard, or not what I really want or can be bothered with?

It doesn't stack up in court, the judge or jury wouldn't buy into this, let you off just because stealing or whatever is just part of who you are.

And that's why we have anger management courses for the people who run their wheelchairs into other peoples legs (in Oamaru), home detention for aggravated robbery (Dunedin), and prison terms for 3D printing firearms (Palmerston North), and fines for people who speed down Kawakawa Road... We're looking to change behaviour. Especially for those who resist behaviour change.

Did Jesus come to bring change? What were the changes the Jesus came for?

Jesus came to bring light. It's positive, it's good for us, and good for the world. How is the world buying into this? How are we buying into this? Are we looking for change, or resisting change? Do we have an inner desire to change to be more like Jesus? To be more Christlike? Because one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to help and enable us to change.

It's pretty easy to see the changes in Paul. This guy who hunted down followers of Jesus to arrest and even kill them, becomes one of the greatest advocates for Jesus. His passion for Jesus is so great, one of Sam's verses a fortnight ago (Acts 21:13), he is even prepared to die for Jesus. What a change!

Acts 21:13 (NIV - UK)

Then Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'

Well, here's how the Jerusalem world was buying into this change. We are around 57AD, 27 years after Jesus rose again. Paul and Luke and representatives from the Gentile churches had arrived in Jerusalem. They had been warmly welcomed (v17). But Paul was warned that some people were upset with what they had heard about him. They had in fact been misinformed (v21), not informed. So, the leaders suggested Paul go with four men, and join them in the temple's purification process, to prove that what the people had heard, was false. This process would last a week. Let's read;

Acts 21:27-36 (NIV - UK)

Paul arrested

27 When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, 'Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.' 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

30 The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. 35 When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, 'Get rid of him!'

Wow, that last line sounded familiar! Wasn't there another time when a mob shouted 'Away with him!' followed by 'crucify him!'

Again we have people who refuse to accept the light that Jesus brought, and continue to dabble in darkness. And we might wonder why Paul decided to go through with the purification process, something from the past. Isn't that all done with? Well, it wasn't going to do Paul any harm, and it was hoped that this would bring peace. We can still wonder, perhaps it would have been better for Paul to have stayed out of Jerusalem? But he felt God calling him, drawing him there.

Again, the same pattern as in, how many Gentile cities? Paul is in trouble. Again. Like Ephesus, where the city was in uproar, and they chanted for their god for two hours. That time Paul was kept from entering the stadium. And so was spared. This time the people take their opportunity, and grab Paul.

Before the Roman commander comes to grab him. Which is ironic that the gentile Roman commander would come down into the very place where Paul was accused of bringing Trophimus the Ephesian! That was in fact acceptable. Going any further into the temple was a different matter. No one other than Jewish men went further into the temple. There were signs in Latin and Greek that were quite clear, that your death was on you if you were found in the Inner Court. Paul would not have taken Trophimus in there.

And what happens in the following verses is so like what happened to Jesus. There's no garden, but Paul is grabbed, as Jesus was. Paul is falsely accused, just like Jesus. Paul is taken before the Romans, like Jesus, who find no grounds for any offence. They recognise his innocence. Oh, and, the people cry 'Away with him'.

These people haven't changed, they are just the way they were.

This isn't just an historical scene. This is a powerful challenge to us to change. We are called to be like Jesus, to be Christlike. How does this look? Well, that's why we have the Bible, we can study what Jesus was like. The fruit of the Spirit that we read of in Galatians 5:22 is perfectly the character of Jesus.

[But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.](#)

These are the things we should be looking to grow in. Leaving behind the opposites to these. These positive characteristics are what bring light into our lives, and into the world. People of Feilding Baptist Church, oh, followers of Jesus should be the ideal neighbours, landlords, tenants, work mates, employees, employers, friends. We should make a difference to those around us because we are not selfish, self centred, greedy, angry, because the Holy Spirit fills us and helps us to be more like Jesus.

This is about having time for all people, not just the ones who we like or who agree with us.

These verses are also a warning that being like Jesus might not be popular or easy. But being Christlike brings light, it's about walking in the light, it's about walking with Jesus. And as author Raynor Winn says, 'We don't always have to seek out the easiest path...sometimes it's the hardest one that holds the greatest riches' (Raynor Winn, Landlines, 297).

But, before we finish, the image that stands out to me, is in v30, the temple doors/gates. And of course we are to contrast these actions to v17, where Paul was warmly welcomed. The image of the temple doors or gates immediately being shut is powerful. I imagine the reality was that they were slammed shut, very quickly, to prevent any of the uproar happening inside. But the slamming shut is for me significant, portraying like the tearing of the temple curtain, the finish of what was going on there. This was again God reminding people of the end of an era.

We are now to be about Jesus, not a temple.

Conclusion

Let's conclude. Should, 'It's just the way I am' come from the mouths of those who are following Jesus? But rather, a striving to be the me I want to be. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can develop some of the character of Jesus. And in doing so, we will be both salt and light to the world.

If any doors are slammed shut, they should be the ones of our sin infested lifestyles, and the character of evil. Let's strive for positiveness and life giving behaviours.

Benediction - Christine Longhurst
(based on Romans 8:26-27)

As we go from here, never forget:
We do not go alone.
God's own Spirit goes with us,
always ready to help in our weakness.
So let's go in confidence and joy,
knowing that wherever we go,
we are surrounded by the love and mercy of God. Amen.