

04/10/2020 **Philippians 3:4b-14**

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Pictures for our Imaginations

Words given in Scripture

So that we can think in a clear way about life with God

Today: from the word of money:

Sitting with your accountant working out profit and loss

Then: From the world of waste management

Marie Kondo: declutter your life – we'll get to this -

From the Courtroom: guilt and innocence

And from the world of Athletics:

Being called to receive the gold medal

Meditation on these images: insight into our life with God

At the conclusion I'll proclaim Good News from the reading:

That as we faithfully live out our vocation God achieves his purposes

For us and the world.

No matter what barriers we face

God's good and gracious will is done for us, and through us for others

OK, let's listen to how today's reading begins:

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

I have come to regard as *loss* - *because of Christ*.

Because of Christ

Because it is in Christ that we are declared innocent

In the courtroom of God – we'll come back to this

But let's note first of all that St Paul says he has come to regard major markers

Of his identity: things like his ethnicity: his family status

His religious commitment

He has come to regard them as *loss*

This is a word from the world of finance

St Paul is looking at the financial statement of his life

And come to the conclusion: there's no lasting profit in these things

If one invests one's life in these things, there's no lasting return
Except, indeed, for death, which is the wage of sin

St Paul now develops the imagery.

It's not just that St Paul writes off his ethnicity, his family status

His religious commitment as *loss*

It's that, *when it comes to standing in God's courtroom*

He writes then off as rubbish:

More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

Let's pause and think about this imagery from a modern perspective

Marie Kondo: *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up* – 30 languages...

[A book, that is evident from my study; I have neither read nor acted on]

Each object: does it bring joy?

Will making things like our ethnicity, or gender, or religious commitment

The core of our identity: Will it bring joy to us or to others?

Will they bring us the peace that comes from being declared innocent by God?

No: in relation to Christ, none of these things are worth holding on to

In relation to Christ they are garbage: there's no lasting joy in them

But in Christ: there is eternal joy with God

Mediate on this: in the courtroom of God you are declared innocent

For Christ's sake: there is power from the Spirit in meditating on this

Turn away from useless things that will not bring lasting joy

In Christ you have a right standing before God

Approval from your heavenly Father

A sharing in glory and honour in the resurrected life

This is not theory for St Paul or for us

It is practical and has practical consequences

Because in letting go of these things

And in trusting that in Christ Jesus God our Father declares us innocent

We have power that comes from the Holy Spirit

We experience the same power that raised Christ from the grave

Listen to what St Paul says:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

St Paul knew that in trusting Christ a new power had entered his life

That freed him to live in a new way

A new way that indeed involved suffering

Especially in suffering opposition

But that did not discourage him, because he knew the end point

He knew where he was headed

Listen to what he writes:

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Here's the imagery from the world of athletics

From the Olympics, we could say

The imagery of an athlete who has competed

Who has completed the race, and is being called forward

To be crowned with the victor's laurel

To be given the gold medal

By God

St Paul encourages to think of ourselves as athletes

Yes, indeed, in the struggle of the life of faith

But headed towards a goal of great honour and glory

Held out to us in Christ Jesus

So that when we are weary; when we face opposition

When we feel like giving up

We know that we are not alone: we are with St Paul

And the great cloud of witnesses

And that God is calling us forward to bring us to honour

To crown us with glory

Remember: when St Paul wrote these words he was in captivity:

From a human point of view his calling as an apostle was at a dead end

It would be easy to understand if St Paul felt like giving up

Here he was, God's chosen servant
Suffering in captivity; relying on handouts from the Philippians
Facing people white anting him from within the church
Both for personal gain, and in direct opposition to his teaching

And yet his was full of joy
He knew he had a calling to live out as an apostle
And he knew that any calling that comes from God
Does not depend on human strength to reach its goal
But that the Holy Spirit gives strength for the race

So even though St Paul was in captivity
Even though there was opposition from within and without
God's word, through St Paul's faithful preaching, went out
Bringing people to faith, establishing the Christian community
So that we are here 2000 years late on the other side of the world
Finding our joy, our peace, our righteousness in Christ Jesus

This has serious practical applications for us
Think about your own vocations
Son or daughter; Husband or wife; Citizen; Employer or employee
Think about the challenges you face
And the temptations you have to give up
And be encouraged by God's word
As you live out your callings faithfully trusting that in Christ Jesus
You have righteousness, that you are declared innocent by God
You will experience the power of Christ Jesus
As, yes, you share in his sufferings
That come with living faithfully in your vocation
But as you are called forward to receive the victory wreath
That God has prepared for you