

Bennochy church 25th June 2017

I don't about you but there are verses in the bible I struggle with. I am not sure what they mean. There are those I am not even sure that I agree with. As a minister, am I allowed to say that? Some of the words of Paul for example, don't make sense to me in 21st century Scotland, but I need to recognise that he was a man of his time. I just hope I am not alone in that thinking like that!

We live in a world miles removed from 1st century Palestine. In some senses we can feel like observers looking into an alien world that we do not know or even recognise. We struggle to see the points of contact. We live our lives in such a different ways. The technological age had not yet come, which dominates our culture today. Our communication is instant. I wonder how Paul would have used social media! It was a manual, agricultural society. Today our economy survives through things like service industries and tourism. Except for the super rich, almost unknown, 2000 years ago.

The world Jesus knew and grew up in was a mixture of theocracy, governed by God, with customs and practices that we would consider almost barbaric, the ritual of sacrifice and certainly we would view it as unenlightened. There was no sense of equality and democracy - slavery was deeply embedded in society. And it was also a land occupied, with undercurrents of rebellion and expectation. Turbulent thoughts

sat side by side. On the one hand, there was the might of Rome, on the other, a hope in the coming of a new king, God's Messiah. I was tempted to say, the might of Westminster and the hope of independence, but I decided best not to!

That was the world of Jesus and the context out of which the words, hopes and faith of scripture were written. No wonder there is much in it we fail to understand. Context is everything. So, the question is, what transcends the centuries? What is there in every generation, in every society and culture that we can say, that links them across the generations?

If we travel back into the depths of the Old Testament, after the Exodus of the people of God into their Promised land, we find a very different experience, from that of the nation of Israel at the time of Jesus. So what is the thread that weaves any form of tapestry through the generations. Something transcends society from the earliest moments of Israel's history, even to today?

Another way to answer that question, is to ask this, what did God say to his people? For Israel, for Jesus and for the people of God in 1st Palestine that was hugely important. Tracing their history as a people, around the promises of God was key to unlocking who God's were . God's words were the back bone of

their identity. That is what made them different for all the other nations of the world round about them.

Its essence it was contained in these words, *Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5), and love your neighbour as you love yourself.* (Leviticus 19:18) Over the centuries this was defined, as showing the compassion of God to the widow, orphan and stranger, to those who were in need, as God had shown his compassion to his people. And Jesus took this image of love to its ultimate expression, love not just your friends, that is easy, but even your enemies. (Matthew 6:44)

It seems to me, it is love that transcended time and is the power of God in history. Never confined in time nor space, to one people or to one place. Paul says, and on this I agree with him, *"I pray that you may have your roots and foundations in love."* If Jesus is the vine, and we looked at that last week, he is the root of our love. If Jesus is the cornerstone, he is also the foundation of who we are, as the body of Christ, built upon, the love of God.

Our worlds might be very different, but God's love remains constant. It is not a love to be understood, but a love to be known, and in that knowing, we wonder, for it is too great to grasp. It is too high. Too wide and too deep. I have said before, if we have experienced love, then we have experienced God.

That is who God is. He is beyond our understanding, except, by his love.

Nothing stays still. We know that. Worlds change. Societies move on, but at the heart of who we are, we find the love of God. That is what holds us together, as a people today, and in the history of all who have known God, in what they believe and in how they act. We cannot put God in a box and we never know the extent of his love.

It would have been much so easier if Jesus has been alive today. Do you not think? Not just to hear his words and witness his miracles, but to share his culture. Maybe then we might have understood, and not see Jesus through the haze of time. But I suspect misunderstanding would still be very much a part of our faith!

Let us be open to the channel of God's love , by the presence of the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, and may his spirit translate what we do not understand, so that today, we stand together, across all time and space, in the presence of Christ. Amen.