

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 30th March 2025

Bible text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-end

As news came in of the earthquake in Myanmar, like many of you, I thought of a member of our All Saints church family – Silja, Paula & Jyrki's daughter who works with the WFP there

She was here over Christmas and joined us at Siren Prayer to pray for justice and peace in the civil war in Myanmar a day or two before returning.

Fortunately, she was travelling, and even left Bangkok shortly before the quake hit there.

As I reached out to her on WhatsApp I realised that this was the third conversation with a member of our church family this week where the pain of the world out there has been brought deep into the heart of our community by relationship – the others are Syria through Ali and Suzan and Ukraine through Natalya and Dmitry and also the deep hurts and differences about that war that emerged at last Sunday's benefit concert news out there

And all of this against the rapidly changing geopolitics that have turned our long-held assumptions about allies, the Rule of Law, and thinking imperial ambitions as a thing of the past

I put this message into the church WhatsApp prayer group

“Lord, as an international church you bring the pain and the needs of the world into the heart of our community - Syria, Ukraine and now Myanmar. Help us to handle this painful privilege lovingly, prayerfully and faithfully... and because it is too much to bear in our own strength please fill us with your Holy Spirit for this calling.”

And I had all of this in mind as I read the NT reading for this Sunday

Let me read it again inviting you to have them in mind too – 2 Corinthians 5:16 to end

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Its an intriguing phrase – how we “regard others from a human point of view ...”

Especially when we find ourselves deeply frightened and uncertain, as our world is either literally or metaphorically subjected to an earthquake – what seemed stable and uncertain shaken and brought into question

What we see unfolding across Europe is a choice between two ways of seeing others, especially the stranger – either as a threat to protect ourselves against or a person like you or me to be welcomed, understood

I am not being naïve – and there are those who really are our enemy, and show themselves to be by their actions – its good we know so we can be wise how we respond

What is especially hard is when those who we thought had our backs now can no longer be trusted – are you my friend, my ally or are you no longer someone I can trust?

The temptation is to throw up boundaries, pull up the drawbridge, close down the borders, “other” the other, boosting our own confidence and image by rubbing theirs

There is another way – it’s about looking for commonalities around which we can gather, about direction of travel even though we may be different distances from the goal, we share the direction of travel

In maths this is called the difference between bounded sets and centred sets

Bounded sets do just that. Draw a circle to say who is in and who is out

All sorts of groups can do that, consciously or unconsciously, including nations, ethnic groups, religious groups, churches

Centred sets also do what they say on the tin – they focus on a compelling gathering point towards which people are drawn or note, choosing to either travelling towards or not

As Christians, we believe that this compelling centre is Jesus

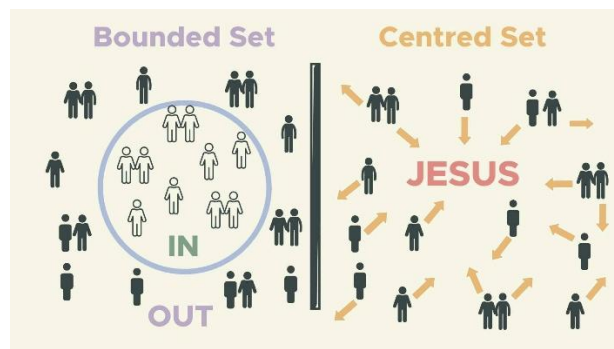
If you think about it, so much of Jesus’ invitation is to a journey, a direction of travel, to be part of a centred set

Come, follow me

Come to me, all who are weary

Repent, turn back

It looks like this – show slide



Pain and anger, our response to trauma may mean people’s behaviour seems very far away from His ideal of love of God, love of neighbour

But the key question is about orientation, direction of travel

And the amazing thing is that God in Christ sees us and others with eyes of infinite possibility and potential

Eyes for someone like the criminal hanging next to Him on the cross – the one rages and curses, the other’s attitude is different – far away in behaviour and lifestyle but turning to hear and respond to the promise: today you will be with me in paradise

Where we still see only the old, in Christ the new is possible

Why?

Because in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (v19)

Reconciling means reaching out with compassion and hope, realistically meeting people where they are at, hearing and staying with their pain and at times inner and outer ugliness, gently inviting them and enabling them to turn back, back into a growing deepening waking up to what it is to be known by God, loved by God and invited into relationship with Him

Indeed, on the cross Christ appears to be way out there on the edge, far from where the religious of his day thought God to be – it was a place of Roman torture and execution, but also a place thought to be of curse and punishment by God

What is crucial though, way the orientation – Christ is from God and is turned towards God – “Not my will but yours be done ...”

And it is still out there today that Christ meets people, in the midst of their pain and the mess, the anger and the disappointment - calling them to turn and direct themselves to the love of God ...

... to let down the boundaries and the barriers and to see others and God no longer from a human point of view, but see in His new way

That if anyone is in Christ, orientated towards Him, there is a new creation – everything old has passed away, everything has and is becoming new

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ (v17-18a)

And we in turn, aware we are now in Christ, are called to see others in this new way, we have been entrusted with this message of reconciliation, we are like ambassadors, Paul says

But I don't know about you, but I find that hard, especially towards those who are the cause of that trauma – so, as I messaged on Friday

“Lord, as an international church you bring the pain and the needs of the world into the heart of our community - Syria, Ukraine and now Myanmar. **Help us to handle this painful privilege lovingly, prayerfully and faithfully... and because it is too much to bear in our own strength please fill us with your Holy Spirit for this calling.**”