

## ***What is the gospel?***

How would you answer the question: *What is the gospel?* As my spiritual journey has continued, it has just struck me that maybe ‘the gospel’, is quite simply a person – Jesus Christ. Certainly, the good news that struck me so powerfully two years ago (as I have probably said ad nauseam) is that God is Trinity; God is relationship; God is love; and that we are able to be part of that relationship. Could there be any better or more wonderful good news (gospel) than that?!

Now, part of my journey was a ‘chance meeting’ with our friend Alex, now a curate, who told me that his church was running a course about the church’s creeds. (Yawn!) *Au contraire!* It has been fascinating and exciting and enlightening and life-affirming.

What was the point of the creeds? It was to **guard the gospel**; it was to make sure, in the first centuries of the church’s life, that the **essential elements of the gospel** were preserved. What were those essential elements? They were (and are) the historic facts about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – ‘for us’ – and about the relationships between the persons of the Trinity.

That for me is the gospel, the good news – end of story.

So here’s my latest attempt to ‘share the gospel’ with my friends, family, editing colleagues or total strangers who happen upon my website. Please, please feed back to me if you think it can be improved in any way! Thanks.

## ***#livingmybestlife***

The thing that gives me most joy in my life is the relationships I have with people around me. But when those relationships go wrong, seriously wrong, life can be absolute hell. And when relationships between groups and nations go wrong, the scale of that hell can be massive.

Why do we inflict such pain on each other? Is it because we’re unintelligent and haven’t worked out how to avoid doing so? Clearly not! Just look around at some of our incredible scientific discoveries and technological achievements – mind-blowing!

The problem with relationships is not *knowledge* but *motivation*. For example, we all know that good diet and exercise are key to good health, but somehow it’s easier not to bother. It was only when I discovered that I had heart disease that I was motivated to make the necessary changes.

If we’re honest, what really motivates us, at individual, corporate and national level, is self-interest. But then again, is ‘getting what we want’ *really* what makes us happy? Is it what make *you* happy? Is it what make *me* happy?

Am I being unrealistic about myself? Arrogant, even? I’m not sure, but what I *think* makes me really happy is doing things for and with other people.

Now, just suppose for a minute that there’s a God. Suppose it’s a **good** God, and not the type of God who sits in heaven telling us what to do and what not to do, and zapping us if we don’t do what he says. Wouldn’t such a **good** God try to help us in our relationships with one another?!

There was a man once who had something to say about this. He lived about 2000 years ago in a place in Palestine called Nazareth, though in fact he was born in Bethlehem and then spent his first few years as a refugee in Egypt.

At the age of about 30, he started wandering around Palestine talking to people about God, and it was as if he knew God personally – he talked about God as his loving father. People found this really attractive and huge crowds came to listen to him. What's more, many people said that they had been healed by Jesus from all sorts of diseases.

Unfortunately, Jesus was much too outspoken. He was quite rude about the religious leaders, saying that they had a totally wrong idea of what God was like – saying that God would smite us if we did thing wrong. Somewhat weirdly, Jesus said that if they wanted to know what God was like, they should look at him: "If you've seen me, you have seen the Father."

The religious leaders really angry, and they tried to stone him, saying "You, a mere man, are claiming to be God!" Later, they tried to push him off a cliff, and it just got worse; eventually they persuaded the Roman authorities that he was a political troublemaker, and he was crucified.

Of course, when Jesus was killed, his followers were totally devastated. But fast forward a few weeks, and clearly something dramatic has happened. They're going around telling everyone that Jesus has come back to life! And they're doing so with incredible boldness, risking their lives.

So what's going on here? After cowering behind locked doors, they are now publically saying that "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact" and "Jesus, whom you crucified, God has made both Lord and Christ."

They are also saying that Jesus has gone back to be with his Father in heaven, and that the Father has sent the Holy Spirit to actually live *within* them – yes, the God who created the whole universe can actually live inside us! Astonishing claims, and the Christian faith then spread around the known world.

So, Jesus claimed to be God, and now the disciples are saying that God, as the Holy Spirit, can live inside us: God the Father, God the Son and now God the Holy Spirit. Confusing or what?!

No, I can't **explain** this, but it tells me that God **IS** love; by definition, in essence, God **IS** loving relationship. What's more, we're invited to be a part of that loving relationship. That's what transforms people's lives and motivates them to love and serve others, even their enemies, despite the suffering that can come. That's what has hit me so powerfully, after 50 years as a Christian.

So if God is like what Jesus is like, and not the toxic image of God that many of us have grown up with, maybe that invites further investigation. You might like to read one of the Gospels to see what Jesus did and said. (Mark's Gospel is short enough to read right through in an evening.)

My prayer is that you'll discover the amazing love that God has for you!

Paul Bev. 3.12.18