

## 278 *The lost message of Jesus?*

After six years, have I finally found the lost message that set the early church alight?

Right from article <sup>[1]</sup> I've known what *wasn't* the message: 'You were evil from the day you were born, you are separated from God, condemned by God, but Jesus died to set you free. Hallelujah!' (I've put it starkly, but is that *not* what you and I have always been taught?)

And I know *why* that is not the message: it doesn't fit with Jesus' teaching. The Prodigal Father wraps his arms around the pig-shit son *and* around the self-righteous (a different form of pig-shit) elder brother, and is only interested in *restoring* them; it's not about *retribution*.

Even the final judgment (which is about 'them' finally getting what 'they' deserve, right?) is actually about *restoration*, putting things *right* at last. And this means that *we* will suffer at the final judgment, as God strips away the wrong in us and restores us to full and final relationship.

So, no, the central message is not: my personal salvation + your (plural; i.e. those we manage to *persuade*) personal salvation => then all will be well.

So what *is* the message? I think it's: **Jesus is Lord** – *that* is the good news.

'Eh? What?!' Sadly, because it's been ignored, we probably haven't a clue what it means. Maybe we need to explore it?

One clue came from a very dear Christian friend this week: We need 'Jesus is **Lord**' + '**Jesus** is Lord'. The latter says it's the *person* who is the **Lord**. Let's explore that!

Maybe this is the same as 'the **kingdom**'? (Do we actually mean anything, each time we pray for it to '**come**'?!) Exploration needed?

But for the message to spread, it has to be something that *works*, something that makes a real difference in the everyday situations we face. My real situation is Sue's dementia, and every day I thank God for drawing us into the open, welcoming, inclusive community of St Ed's.

And for Sybil,<sup>[249,256]</sup> the real situation is her terrible mental health, on antidepressants for 16 years, feeling estranged from her children and grandchildren. Clearly, persuading her about personal sin isn't going to help. Frustratingly, when I visited her and I popped into the local church (Sybil owns a long bargepole!), I sensed a St Ed's-like community: with open arms they welcomed me and prayed for me and for Sybil. Thy kingdom come in Knutsford, please, Lord!

And what day it is today? It's the forgotten festival – Ascension Day – totally ignored by most Christians, I'm guessing. What is it about, anyway? 'Jesus is Lord', perhaps?

Maybe all we need is Christmas (Emmanuel, God with us), Good Friday (Jesus' death solves the problem of personal sin) and Easter Day (proof for persuading people). Who needs Ascension?

Sorry, I'm not being cynical, really. There is hope, but we've got some work to do to recover the lost message, right?

Paul Bev. (Ascension Day) 18 May 2023