

SERMON – 1/9/19 – 'I am Yours and You are mine'

Deuteronomy 5:22-33

“If only they would always honour me, says the Lord, and obey all my commands, so that everything would go well with them and their descendants for ever.” (Deuteronomy 5:29)

Sometimes you see something that just makes you gasp with amazement. I have to say that I am often amazed by the wonders that can be seen in the heavens – the splendour of a colourful sunset, the majestic sweep of the milky way across the dark sky on a frosty evening, contemplating the dance of stars and planets in the regularity of their orbits.

Yesterday I came across this picture, or more correctly 52 pictures all superimposed upon each other, taken by astronomers in Bourgos in Spain, one each week from exactly the same spot at exactly the same time of day with a filter on the camera to remove the glare of the sun. The figure eight (or perhaps it is the mathematical symbol for infinity) is made up of where the sun is each week of the year. It's apparently called a 'solar analemma' – I learned a new word yesterday too! – but more significantly as far as I was concerned it was amazing in a stunningly beautiful way.

It also has to be said that sometimes the amazing is to be found in people's behaviour. Yesterday I also heard the story of a day when there were mass cancellations of planes at a certain airport. You can imagine the chaos, but there was one staff member who kept her cool throughout, explaining to stressed passengers what was happening, taking all the pent-up anger and vilification, helping people to make alternative arrangements. As things began to get back to normal a man came up to her and asked her name so that he could write to the management about the outstanding service she had given. 'Well, sir, you can write to the airline if you wish, but I'm not really working for the airline, I'm working for Jesus Christ.'

Incredibly, these things are connected. The creator of the universe is almighty and all-glorious and does amazing things by the word of His power but He also takes pleasure in His people, which is totally astounding.

Last week we read about the people of Israel refusing to trust God and being sentenced to wander aimlessly in the wilderness for 40 years until a whole generation had died out. How easily we each could take a similar path through our failure to respond to God's call.

But this morning I want to hold out to you the possibilities that unfold when God's people *do* decide to trust the Lord, to walk in His ways and to go where He is leading. When people take hold of the amazing grace of God they begin to do amazing things themselves, like that airline employee and like countless ordinary and extra-ordinary people down through the ages.

So here are the people of Israel back at Kadesh Barnea on the verge of the Promised Land where their forefathers had disobeyed 40 years previously and Moses is preaching to them, rehearsing what had happened then and proclaiming to them that although they had been children (or had not even been born) when the Law was given the Lord had also been speaking to *them* face to face from out of the terrifying fire of His presence.

'Be still, we sang earlier, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around; He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned: How awesome is the sight – our radiant King of light! Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.' (David J Evans) He is here just as He was with the people of Israel at Sinai and with their descendants on the borders of Canaan. Should we not also be awe-stricken here this morning? God Himself is speaking, and it's amazing. 'God who made the earth, the air, the sky, the sea, who gave the light its birth. God who made the sun, the moon, the stars, is He who when life's clouds come on careth for me. God who sent His Son to die on Calvary, He, if I lean on Him, will care for me.' (Sarah Betts Rhodes)

The Ten Commandments are fundamental, the first four concerning our relationship with God, the remaining six concerning our relationship with other people and all summed up by Jewish teachers over the centuries and by Jesus of Nazareth in the phrases 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.' Although the person-focussed commandments are the basis of human law in virtually every culture across the world and throughout history, it is the more fundamental, Godward commandments, the ones that even believers tend to put to one side that have to be our starting point

If we want to honour God in the way we live and in the way we relate to one another, if we want to be part of a society where human beings truly thrive and flourish, then first we must look upward. It is of the utmost

importance for us to grasp that the basis for our living is our believing, that our actions follow from our faith, and that the rightness of our relationships with one another is founded on our relationship with God.

As the people of Israel stand once more on the brink of the Land that their fathers had been promised so long before, Moses puts the deal on the table once more: “I am the Lord your God who rescued you from Egypt where you were slaves. Worship no god but me. Do not make an idol of anything, to worship it. Do not misuse my name. Keep the Sabbath.” This is not some business transaction with a catch; this is not some political deal with a hidden agenda; this is not some legal agreement with small print. This is the Lord God of heaven and earth, the Creator of the universe, reaching out to frail human beings in tender love and compassion, so that everything will go well for them. Amazing grace.

And the people see it for what it is. “Has any human being ever lived after hearing the living God speak from a fire?” (v.26) They respond with glad faith and commitment. “Go back, Moses, and listen to everything that the Lord our God says. Then return and tell us what He said to you. *We will listen and obey.*” (v.27) It's a deal.

If that was the experience of God's people under the old covenant, then how much more so is it the case for us who have received the new covenant through the blood of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews sums it up perfectly in chapter 12 of that letter:

“You have not come, as the people of Israel came, to what you can feel, to Mount Sinai with its blazing fire, the darkness and the gloom, the storm, the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of a voice. When the people heard the voice, they begged not to hear another word, because they could not bear the order which said, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling and afraid!”

Instead, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, with its thousands of angels. You have come to the joyful gathering of God's first-born, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, who is the judge of all people, and to the spirits of good people made perfect. You have come to Jesus, who arranged the new

covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that promises much better things than does the blood of Abel.”

“I will be your God and you will be my people,” says the Lord. And in our time we too are invited to respond: “I am Yours, Lord, and You are mine.” It's a deal. “Tis done, the great transaction's done. I am my Lord's and He is mine. Oh, happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away.”

You have come to Jesus, whose hands flung stars into space and whose same hands surrendered to cruel nails for our sake upon the Cross. How amazing that the Lord of the universe is interested in what is best for us; that the God of eternity longs for us to follow His ways, the way of life that He knows will be best for us. He holds out the invitation afresh to us this morning to draw near to Him and to enter into covenant with Him.

Do you trust Him? Well then, acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Saviour and commit yourself afresh this morning to follow Him as Lord. Or if you have never truly entered into fellowship with God, come to Him today. In Him there is peace and there is fulness of life. Today is the day of salvation.

Do you trust Him? Then come to this Table and by sharing in these tokens of bread and wine, take to yourself and share with those around you the life-transforming benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. In Him there is forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Right here before us on the Table are the signs of the covenant for us to take and eat as a response of faith. Don't hold back.

Do you trust Him? Then will you come to God in prayer in these days? Let us humble ourselves as individuals and as a congregation as we seek His blessing and His enabling for those things that we cannot accomplish in our own strength. “Put me to the test, says the Lord, and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things.” (Malachi 3:10) As we enter this national season of prayer and preparation, let us draw near in faith this week and in the coming weeks, taking hold of God's promises, taking hold of His willingness to give. What will the living God do in us and among us and through us in these days?

God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or even imagine. Just think of the wonders of the universe which are beyond human telling, and

just think of the amazing love and grace which the Creator poured out when He came to this world in the Person of His Son and gave up His life for you and for me, sealing His eternal covenant with us by the shedding of His own blood.

“If only they would always honour me, says the Lord, and obey all my commands, so that everything would go well with them and their descendants for ever.” Well then, my friends. It's over to us.