

LANZAROTE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP 3rd APRIL 2016
READINGS: EZEK. 36:22-32; COL. 3:1-11

This is the first Sunday after Easter... chance for us to reflect upon Easter/the Resurrection... what the Resurrection means to us...how the Resurrection should change our lives...what it means to be '*raised with Christ*' as Paul says to the Christians at Colosse. To understand why Paul says that to the Colossians, we need to know a bit about the background of that church/the Christians who made up that church.

Colosse and the region around it was a hotbed of pagan religions...all the gods of the pagan world were worshipped in and around Colosse...the whole culture of that region was steeped in paganism. Now why is that significant?

Because the church at Colosse was made up of new converts... many had become Christians...many had been converted to Christ.... the church is full of new Christians.... keen, 'kicking' Christians as a clergy friend of mine used to call new, enthusiastic converts.

They were keen.... enthusiastic....they wanted their lives to honour their Lord and Saviour....but they were struggling... weren't progressing as they had hoped or wanted.... were becoming frustrated and discouraged.

Struggling because of old habits... old patterns of behaviour. A habit is a bit like a cable... a person weaves a thread everyday until it becomes impossible to break the cable.

Struggling because they were living in a non-Christian culture... surrounded by non-believers... were finding it hard to stand out from the crowd... to swim against the current... to oppose the thinking and the will of the majority around them.

Struggling because they were immature Christians.... new converts with hearts not yet fully consecrated to the Lord. They had accepted Christ, but they were not yet perfect. Sound familiar?! A new heart and a new spirit had been placed within them (our Ezek. Reading), but they hadn't 'arrived'.

And they were struggling because the enemy, Satan, was behind the scenes, stirring everything up...doing all he could to keep them locked into those old habits...reinforcing in their minds just how hard it was to be a Christian.... to be different, to stand out from the crowd. Enticing them to give up.... underlining

just what a failure they were...'Call yourself a Christian? Just look at yourself. Take a look at the mess your life is! Give up!'

They were struggling... they weren't doing very well at all. Just look at some of the things they were struggling with in their lives – (Read Col.3:5-9). Their lives really were a mess... they were really struggling – but – they wanted to change.

Then along come along some false teachers (not that the Colossian Christians identified them as false teachers initially). This is the 'Colossian heresy' that theologians struggle to identify exactly... lets just say there were a number of false teachers doing their thing in the church at Colosse. These people come along and they say, 'You're struggling... you're fighting a losing battle... you're being overcome by temptation... your old nature is still very much to the fore... you're wanting to change – we are just the people to help you. Don't despair, we can help!'

What they were actually saying was, 'your faith in Christ is fine, as far as it goes, but it's not enough... it's not sufficient... you need something more... your faith is deficient, that's why you're struggling'.

So, they would say things like, 'follow our rules and regulations.... physical circumcision is essential...be careful what you eat.... don't eat unclean food... be more committed... observe special holy days'. In other words it was Christ *plus* - Christ *plus* the law.... Christ *plus* rules, regulations and ritual.

Others were saying, 'deny yourself physical pleasures and enjoyment... keep the body and its passions under control... deny yourself...don't eat this... don't handle that.... don't have anything to do with the other'. In other words, Christ *plus* – Christ *plus* asceticism.

Others were saying, 'become mature like us... we've arrived... we've moved up a level... we used to struggle too, but look at us now. We now have knowledge... we've moved on... we know the secret to spiritual maturity'. In other words, Christ *plus*... Christ *plus* enlightenment.... Christ *plus* philosophy.

Still others were saying, 'get into angel worship... have this spiritual experience that we've had... that will make all the difference... that is what will make your faith come alive'. In other words, Christ *plus* – Christ *plus* spiritual experience.

Some things never change! As Christians we all struggle from time to time....times when we are dissatisfied with our Christian lives – and that's

good.... that's positive... we want to change.... we want our lives to be more honouring to him... but – when we are struggling that's the time we can be at our most vulnerable.... our most susceptible to false teaching.... to those who say, 'you're struggling, we can help!' In our vulnerability we then begin to listen uncritically to those who say, 'what you need is Christ *plus*'.

Christ *plus* a bit of new age philosophy..... or Christ *plus* a new spiritual experience. That's always a big 'pull' in our day and age. I remember a time many years ago when the so called Toronto Blessing appeared on the scene. I was playing golf with a clergy friend when he said, 'are you going to Toronto? That was what was expected back in the 90's – go to Toronto to get this new spiritual experience. Then it was Pensecola... and so it goes on, even now. Get this new spiritual experience. Christ *plus*...a new spiritual experience.

Or, Christ *plus* our understanding of Scripture... or Christ *plus* our scriptures in addition to the bible, as in Mormonism. Christ *plus*... which is at the heart of all the cults. Your faith in Christ is deficient. You need our understanding of the scriptures... you need our knowledge... we are the enlightened ones. Again – Christ *plus* and so it goes on.... Christ *plus* human philosophy... Christ *plus* legalism... Christ *plus* mysticism.... Christ *plus* asceticism. Christ *plus*.... Christ *plus*.

'No', says Paul, 'It's not Christ *plus* – it's Christ *alone*'. His letter is refuting the teachings of those who say, 'Christ *plus*'. 'It's not Christ *plus*', says Paul...'your faith is not deficient... you are not lacking anything.... Christ is all sufficient'.

What he is saying is this: 'If you believe in Christ... if you have come to him in repentance and faith, you have been born again by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit indwells you... you have a new heart... a new spirit within you... your old nature has been crucified with Christ... everything that needs to be done has been done for you by Christ to live that new life in him. Christ has done it all – now live it out – become what you are!

That is the thrust in all of Paul's letters – first half, teaching on Christ... who he is... what he has done. Paul expounding the great doctrines of the Christian faith. He's all theological. Then, in the second part of his letters, he goes all practical. Because of what Christ has done, it is now possible to live like this. Become what you want to be... become what you are in Christ. Live it out!

In one sense he is saying to the Colossians, 'you are the finished article'. Now don't misunderstand me here. You may not feel like the finished article, and your spouse, and certainly mine, would be able to tell you that we are not yet

the finished article! But in the sense that all is in place for us to live out the Christian life – we are the finished article. Christ has done it all for us, there is nothing more for us to do.... nothing more that he needs to do... nothing more is needed for us to live out this new life in Christ. You start adding anything to Christ... if you start thinking in terms of Christ *plus*, you will end up doing yourself untold damage to your spiritual life. That's what Paul is warning and teaching the Christians at Colosse about.

Here's a silly (and imperfect) analogy! Suppose I say to you, 'Come and look at my brand new car. It's parked outside'. It's a top of the range Mercedes sports coupé (I wish!). It has a V8 4.5 litre six cylinder engine. It has a top speed of 190mph (very useful in Lanzarote!) and does 0-60 mph in 3.2 seconds. It has cruise control... automatic braking...park assist... headlamps that can look round corners. It has everything!' As far as I'm concerned, that car is the finished article – it can't be improved upon.

Somebody comes along and says, 'You may think it's the finished article Adrian, and certainly it's a very nice car, but it lacking something... it's deficient... it doesn't have four wheel drive.... it's not a 4x4 so it's no good for going off-road'. That would be ridiculous wouldn't it? That car is not designed to go off-road... if you were to add four wheel drive to it, and drove it off-road, you would cause it untold damage. It's not a Mercedes Sports Coupé *plus*.... it's a Mercedes Sports Coupé! Everything is in place for that car to do what it was designed to do.

Everything is in place for me to experience this car, but there is one thing I have to do before I can experience that car. I've got to get in that car and drive it. I've got to get in the car and turn the ignition... turn the key.

Not a perfect analogy by any means, and don't push it too far, but maybe it will just help us to get an understanding of what Paul is saying. If you are in Christ, you are the finished article, because Christ is all sufficient. You are complete in him. You don't need anything else for you to become what he has made it possible for you to be. But you have to 'turn the ignition', as it were. You have to put in place certain things for you to begin to experience what you now are in Christ.

That's what we are going to look at over the next few weeks – the 'keys' that Paul talks gives us to live out this new life in Christ:

Key 1 – Seek things above

Key 2 – Set your mind on things above

Key 3 – Put to death what is earthly in you

Key 4 – Put away the life you once lived.

At the end of those 3 or 4 weeks, I trust that we will have a deeper understanding of what it means to be '*risen with Christ*' ... to better understand how to live out the risen life... to be able to use the keys Paul gives us to live out this new life in Christ, powerfully and effectively to bring honour and glory to his name.