**15th July 2018**

**Ephesians 1**

It’s coming home, its coming home…

Sadly, the only thing coming home is the England football team - without the world cup. They say it’s the hope that kills you. So near yet so far. 28 years after the last time we were beaten in the world cup semifinal, it’s been the opportunity of a new generation of supporters to experience the disappointment of dashed hopes and dreams.

I was born in 1966 and I was six months old when England made their only appearance in the World Cup Final. My father decided to take me out in my pram whilst 30 million people watched the match clustered around black and white TV screens. He took me train spotting down at the local railway station. Not surprisingly there was nobody around. I’m not sure whether my father was just being obstinate and unconventional and not going with the crowd or whether he couldn’t stand the tension and the possible despair of defeat? Anyway – anyone fancy some train spotting about 4pm this afternoon?

In another way it has been coming home. The competition has restored England's reputation and reconnected the public to their football team. It has been a unifying moment at a time when the nation is in disunity over Brexit. What has come home has been a revival of communal spirit.

In our Bible passage today, we start a series looking at Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In his opening chapter he is full of praise at the unity of all things, the wonder of creation and God’s plan for it and our part in that plan. He reminds his readers to come home. Come home to their creator and get a bigger picture as to what home means.

Ephesians is a fantastic letter in the New testament. There is much critical debate about when and who wrote it – and I’ll offer a Bible Class next month to explore this letter in more detail. But I will take the view that Paul wrote it from prison, not sure whether he would live or die, and that he wrote it as a circular letter to the churches he founded in the region to set down on paper the bigger picture about what their Christian hope was, what life is all about, the struggles but also the joys we have in Christ.

The letter starts of with praise:

***3****Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.****4****For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love****5****he[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-29212b)*] predestined us for adoption to sonship[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-29212c)*] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will –****6****to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

Today we have given thanks for birth of Ernest. Steph and Jim have changed from being a couple to being a family. That transition can be difficult for many, it can be a source of great blessing for most, can be something longed for by others.

We can become solely focused on the needs of our children – the centre of our personal universe can change, can narrow. This passage reminds us that we, nor our children, are not the ‘centre of gravity’ in the world. We habitually live on a map that is much too small: me, my family, my tribe, my country, my goals, my life. God’s heart is so big, it takes in the whole cosmos, including all the ‘others’ we don’t notice. Our chosen part in God’s plan is to make God’s love become visible everywhere, but especially in places we don’t usually notice very much.

We are chosen to be a part of God’s plan for the gathering together of the whole cosmos into God’s heart. Each one of us is especially chosen and, says Paul, has been in God’s mind since before the foundation of the world.

It is breathtaking stuff the range of this vision. Most of us concentrate on just trying to get through life with its ups and downs, its victories and defeats. But Paul places all our lives in the context of God’s plan for the whole cosmos.

Where is our centre of gravity? What is home? Many people today in our society don’t believe in a Creator, that there is a God behind all that is. In a few weeks’ time I will give a meeting looking at engaging with Atheists and their challenge to people of faith and our challenge to them. They may think we are delusional - needing a heavenly father figure to help us cope with life when we need to toughen up and take responsibility for our own lives. Now is not the time to go into that argument – but the Bible in all its writings never says we shouldn’t take responsibility for our actions, our values and lifestyle and their impact on others and the world and the environment around us. But we also have the wonderful extra aspect of knowing the love and security of a heavenly parent, a creator God who brings grace and power into our lives. We should have that bit extra that makes a difference. Why wouldn’t you be interested in a bit of help in life? If I didn’t believe in God I would want to believe in God to save me from the meaninglessness and ultimate futility of this life.

Steph and Jim chose a reading from Psalm 139

*For you created my inmost being;
    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.****14****I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
    your works are wonderful,
    I know that full well.*

In our daily Bible notes this week was a lovely comment on these verses by Jane Gonzalez.

She said when her mother was expecting her birth they lived for a while with an aunt and uncle. Her cousin Gerald, was then a schoolboy about 14 years old. Her mother told her that Gerald learnt to knit so that he could make something for his little cousin who was on the way. He produced a pair of bootees. She said ‘I don’t think they were ‘wonderfully made’ but they were, in her eyes one of the best gifts she ever received.

There is something special about homemade gifts, however well or imperfectly produced they are. It is charming and humbling to be presented with something that has cost not mere money, but the maker’s time, care and effort. And it can be very satisfying to make something original to give.

Jane Gonzalez says the reading from Psalm 139 conjures up a marvellous image of life being shaped and formed perfectly by the Creator God. Each human person, even if they may not appear so on the outside, is unique, a work of art. To the eye that does not see clearly, there may be some dropped stitches, a piece of pattern gone awry, but that is to miss the glory of God reflected in each and every one of his children. [[1]](#endnote-1)

Paul reminds us in this passage that coming home in this passage is much bigger than our paternal homes. Home is the cosmos and God is our creator. We are home-made, chosen, adopted, loved and special. When we realise that – we start to come home.

Coming Home is realising our part in that home setup and the plan God has for restoring the cosmos.

 *he[*[*d*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-29216d)*] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,****10****to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (verse 9-10)*

President Trump revealed the mystery of his will this week – he says one thing and then denies it – Fake News – we are never sure where truth lies with that man.

Paul writes this letter in the immediate aftermath of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which changed history and still changes history. It gave birth to the Christian faith, in the context of a world where there were many different views of god’ and goddesses and what life was all about. Paul makes the staggering claim that in Jesus we see God’s image, grace love and forgiveness and God’s plan to redeem and save this world.

So, he issues praise in this chapter. We have redemption, forgiveness, grace, wisdom, understanding purpose, hope, salvation, an inheritance. You could spend a year of sermons unpacking all this.

But Paul starts his great letter on what life and faith is all about by praising God for what God has done and will do in redeeming our world and us in it. Redeeming means buying back, changing the bad into the good, restoring or renewing, saving. God has a rescue plan.

As England’s football team progressed through the World Cup people started saying ‘it’s coming home’ a reference to a song issued twenty or so years ago when England hosted the European Championships. For many supporters it seemed like destiny that we would get to the final. But unfortunately, that wasn’t to be. The Christian hope rests on God and the work of Jesus. A bit more secure than Gareth Southgate, nice guy though he is, and his boys.

This weeks’ other story about a football team of course was the story of how a football team of young boys, the Wild Boars, got trapped down a cave in Thailand due to rising flood water. The world has been gripped by the rescue mission, that included two British divers John Volanthen and Rick Stanton, that finally freed them all after 17 days in darkness. [[2]](#endnote-2)

The boys kept going by drinking water dripping from the rocks and by meditation. The coach of the football team was a former Buddhist monk and he taught the boys meditation to help them handle the stress.

When the rescuers managed to get through to the team, they delivered [letters from their families](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44748927) and took notes back to allow them communication with the outside world.

In his letter, the coach apologized to the parents for taking the boys into the cave network, but several replied to say they did not blame him. Thailand typically does not have a 'blame culture', where a culprit must be found for any misadventure. There is a more fatalistic acceptance of things going wrong, less public clamour for accountability.

The coach had written in his letter "I promise I will take care of the kids as best as I can,".

The Christian parents of a boy who was part of a youth football team rescued from a flooded cave in Thailand have thanked God that he has been rescued.

Their son is sponsored through Compassion, a Christian children's charity.

They told the organization: "Thank you to God who helps us to see our son very soon.

"We are so happy to hear that our son is out of the cave and to welcome him home. It's the love that God gives to our family. God is great love and there's nothing He can't do."[[3]](#endnote-3)

All ended happily, except for the death of one brave diver who ran out of air trying to help the trapped boys.

The story of course has many parallels with the Christian story about what life is all about, what we understand about the world, our home, and God’s plan for it.

Life can be a big adventure, like exploring a cave. But sometimes we can get unstuck, trapped and fall into peril, even death. God’s rescue plan involved the sacrifice of his own Son because God loves us so much. But death, our last enemy couldn’t defeat Christ and that is our ultimate hope of rescue. God has written letters to us, through scripture to remind us that he created us and loves us and will not let us go. We may not know why things happen to us – but we can know of God’s eternal presence and plan.

The young boys came home. We will go home one day, reunited with all of God’s creation.

Paul praises God in this opening chapter from Ephesians: a God who has chosen us, blessed us, saved us and redeems us. When we realize all that in our lives we have truly come home.

Prayers

**Call to worship**

God the Father who blesses us,
God the Son who saves us,
God the Spirit who fills us,
calls us now to worship.
**Amen.**



**A gathering prayer**

Lord God of all,
when we allow ourselves
the time and space to meet with you,
we are blown away by the knowledge that,
before the creation of the world,
you had a plan for us –
and even now you are working out that plan
through us, gathered here.
Open our hearts, Lord,
to receive all you have for us.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

Lord of all creation,
we come humbly before you;
not puffed up with our own achievements or strength,
but ready to lay ourselves open
before the supreme planner,
ready to take our part in your world.
As the stars shine brightly in the sky,
we want to light up our world for you.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession**

Lord, we confess that sometimes we find it hard to understand the here and now, never mind creation and what came before. There are so many things about you that go way beyond our understanding. Sometimes it feels too much like hard work to even want to understand.

Forgive us, Lord,
for the times we don’t appreciate
how truly amazing it is to be chosen by you;
for the times we question you
and don’t live out your plan;
for the times we feel sorry for ourselves
and just don’t realise that we are part of your plan;
for the times we don’t question you
and still don’t live out your plan.
Forgive us, Lord, and get us back on track.
Bless us, Lord.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving** **and intercession**

Praise be to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He chose us in love
to be holy and blameless.
He called us in love
to hear the good news of salvation.
He blessed us in love
and included us in his most marvellous plan.
Praise be to God.
**Amen.**

[[4]](#endnote-4)Paul talks about being chosen, a bittersweet concept for anyone connected with adoption and fostering

We pray for birth parents, who have often made a heart-wrenching choice to give up a child, in order to give that child the possibility of a better life. We pray for Adoptive parents will of course be thankful for the [choice to adopt](http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/being-an-adoptive-parent/) or foster, and we pray for the 2,000 children in the UK are on the adoption list, still waiting to be chosen.
that they will find the love and security they need.
**Bless them, good Lord.**

We pray for social workers and organisations
that work to bring families together. Especially as social workers are concerned that new guidance means that they may be left without managers’ support when making those critical safeguarding decisions behind most adoption stories.[[5]](#endnote-5)

May love and deep understanding guide their steps.
**Bless them, good Lord.**

We pray for parents who have
difficult choices to make for their families.
Be in their thoughts and decision-making.
**Bless them, good Lord.**

For women during every stage of pregnancy and in the midst of childbirth;

for all those who are going through the often silent struggle of trying to conceive;

for those who have faced miscarriage or lost children;

for those whose children are fighting for their lives or are facing illness;

**bless them good Lord.**

for women experiencing post-natal depression and birth trauma, may they find comfort and know they are not alone;

for those who are forced to raise their children in war, poverty, refugee camps, disaster zones or under oppression;

**bless them good Lord**

for parents everywhere who are doing their best;

for family and friends who are there through the ups and downs;

**bless them good Lord**

For the miraculous NHS staff who have been providing life-saving support for 70 years.

Bless all who work for the NHS good Lord and those in government that they may make wise decision to protect and provide for our health system.

We pray for those who
have yet to find their purpose in life,
or those who live each day without hope.
**Bless them, good Lord.**

**We pray for those on our hearst … and those named in our prayer book**

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much
that we have been chosen by you.
May our lives be worthy of our calling.
**Bless us, good Lord.**
**Amen.**

1. Jane Gonzalez, Fresh from the Word 2018, Christian Education, p191 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44792455> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Christian-parents-of-boy-rescued-from-Thai-cave-There-s-nothing-God-can-t-do?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=9650855_daily%20news%2011%20july&utm_content=1&dm_i=16DQ,5QUNB,KCOFX7,ME3YT,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jane Chevous <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2018/96-july-august-2018-b/proper-10/postscript> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2018/07/06/government-introduces-vehemently-opposed-change-social-work-practice-working-together-guidance/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)