**Reflections 22-28 June ‘Change for the better’**

**Bible study on Galatians 3:23-29**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord God, thank you that you are always showing us new things in our world.
We remember rainbows after rain
and the cleansing effect of a strong wind.
We think of a grimy world made white and pure by snow,
and a beach washed clean by the tide.
Most of all, we thank you for the new start you gave the world in Jesus.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

### Children of God

**23**Before the coming of this faith,[[j](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=galatians%203&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29126j)] we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. **24**So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. **25**Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

**26**So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, **27**for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28**There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

Paul’s great manifesto of freedom reaches a crescendo in this passage, namely that, through what Jesus has done, we are one family, heirs of the promise that God made to Abraham. And everyone who believes, whether rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, male or female, is equally an heir. These fault lines of the ancient world are each undermined by the gospel.

The importance of this is that believers in Jesus are included in the promise to Abraham, father of the people of Israel, a promise made before the Law was given, so the Law has nothing to do with this. As Paul says in verse 23, the Law acted as a jailer, keeping a lid on rebellious behaviour while the world waited for God to fulfil his promise and send a Saviour, Christ. The faith spoken of throughout this passage is as likely to be that of Jesus (in obedience to God) as of believers in him; it was his faithfulness to God’s call that ensured God could keep his promise to Abraham to save the world.

Faith gives access to a community of equals where racial and gender divisions are important but not primary, where our place in the social pecking order has no bearing on our relationship with God – we are all one in Christ.

In keeping with the rest of the letter, the language here is very apocalyptic. Paul is contrasting two time-zones. The old order marked by sin, death and the Law has been swept away by the new order of reconciliation and life and freedom in the Spirit (which Paul will unpack as the letter unfolds). Paul uses the imagery of the Law being a jailer and our redemption through Jesus being like a jailbreak; it is through Jesus that the new creation has erupted into the world, and we have been freed from ‘the present evil age’ (Galatians 1:4).

But the outcome is very practical: in the Church we are equals. We have each been freed by the cross and resurrection of Jesus and are equal participants in the new thing God is doing. As a result, we can help one another to change for the better.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Galatians 3:28 is often seen as a manifesto for equality in the Church – we are all equal in Christ. But how is this actually worked out among us in our congregation? What roles do women and men play in the life and leadership of our congregation? Are people of all races able to participate at all levels in church life? Are those without much by way of material wealth able to sit alongside the wealthy in decision-making and leadership?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* How has faith changed you for the better?
* What does it mean to be clothed in Christ?
* We are all one in Christ – there are no labels. Who do you know that needs to hear this?

 **Prayer**

‘If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.’ Galatians 3:29

Thank you, Lord, that we each have a story.
Maybe not as dramatic as the possessed man, but unique to us.
That man received new clothes and a new life,
and changed beyond all recognition.
Thank you for giving us the same amazing possibility,
and give us his faith and willingness
to share the good news of new life all around.
**Amen.**