

Cowper 200

Galatians 1.1-10

Aug 16th, 2009

St Philip's, York Street Anglican

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He was a mere 30 years old on Sunday August 20th, 1809,

... The day that William Cowper ascended the pulpit
For the first time in Old St Philip's.

What would this young man preach that Sunday?

What words would he use?

What exhortation would he offer?

As a young man, William Cowper had been a soldier in England.

Learning to take orders.

As a 20 year old, in 1799, he married 16 year old Hannah.

Who gave birth to their four children: Henry, Thomas, Mary, and Charles,

Cowper had been influenced by the evangelical Anglicans

From his town in Hull, in Yorkshire.

Men like William Wilberforce and others, whose love for Jesus

Had given them fuel to fight slavery and other injustices.

And so he had come to personally know Jesus Christ.

And God's plan for the Redemption of the World in Jesus Christ.

Cowper knew the Truth

In a world bursting with deceit

He came to know Hope

In a world short on Hope.

So he became a solider of God, rather than of state.

And was ordained in 1808.

Agreeing to take his Hannah and 4 kids to NSW as Chaplain.

But before he boarded a ship bound for the Colony,

His beloved Hannah died in June 1808.

Leaving Cowper a Widower with 4 children.

He then married one Ann Barrell

In January, 1809.

Who was to become known – we are told on the memorial to your right

As having a ‘steadfast and lively faith in Christ’.

The mother of William Macquarie.

A mere six weeks after their marriage, young Ann Cowper could be found

Ushering her newly acquired step-children onto the *Indispensible*

Bound for Sydney.

They arrived August 18, 1809, 200 years ago this Tuesday.

Cowper had been in the colony – still controlled by rebels—

For less than 48 hours

When he rose in that pulpit that Sunday.

The rebels had overthrown the Governor Bligh.

The colony was a mess.

And this man showed up in the middle of that rebellion.

Jet Lag was still 150 years away.

He found his Land Legs quickly to preach.

What text would he choose?

20th August, 1809 was known as the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Now, we know the Epistle set for that day.

In our Book of Common Prayer

It is 2 Corinthians 3:4.

Says the Apostle:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are sufficiency in ourselves, but our sufficiency comes from God.

Surely a perfect text for a nervous young man.

In a tough and rogue colony.

But we know that he did not preach from the lectionary that Sunday.

What would he tell them from that Pulpit?

His chosen text was read to us this morning by Bill Cowper:

Galatians 1:10--

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Cowper will not be a people pleaser.

He will be a Servant of Christ.

Answerable to Christ alone.

We can only guess why he chose that text that day.

Dr Peter Bolt, who wrote Cowper's latest Biography:

Due to be launched tomorrow.

Offers a speculation.

On his arrival, Cowper had met with the Acting Governor

Who had offered to him a piece of advice:

"Regard every man as a rogue until he be found to be an honest man."

In such an environment, where would Cowper gain his cues?

Where will this soldier find his orders?

Whom will he seek to please?

Where will the resources come from to serve?

Where will the energy come from to keep going?

Who will he allow to influence his decisions?

Will he be bullied?

Who will cajole him to say certain things at certain times?

William Cowper sets out an agenda for his ministry:

He will please Christ alone.

Here is a truth about all of us – Cowper's included:

We all need approval.

Most of us are addicted to approval.

We don't like to admit it, but we need applause.

And we make choices based on what people think.

But Cowper's LEGACY is founded on this one guiding principle:

He lived his life on the desires of his Messiah Jesus.

George Whitefield -- an 18th Century Anglican Evangelical Reformer

Who no doubt had influence on the evangelicals in the 19th Century.

He said this:

"God give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and single eye, and then let men or devils do their worst."

With that kind of Passion, Cowper built a LEGACY for Christ.

That benefited the Parish of St Philip's for 49 years as Rector.

And the colony.

To the Glory of God.

What kind of Legacy will we leave?

No Doubt he chose that Galatians

For he would have perceived in the Apostle Paul a similar situation.

The Apostle Paul was worried about the legacy of the Gospel of Jesus
In the Churches in Galatia (now modern Turkey).

He considered these young Christians as family.

And yet the Galatians Christians were going soft on Jesus.

Soft on the Grace of God.

They were choosing a mainstream path.

And it had affected their ability to love.

To serve and to experience joy in God.

And Paul perceived a group of towns about to lose the true Gospel.

And he wanted a better legacy for his friends.

And so he passionately speaks to them about keeping the Gospel central.

Even if he will lose friends doing so.

He is kind.

But he is tough.

My question for us all today:

How can we honour the Legacy of William Cowper?

Allow me to offer three ways to honour his legacy

As a reflection on Cowper's text that Sunday:

Galatians 1:1-10:

First, please God alone.

Second, choose the Gospel alone.

Third, believe in Grace alone.

1 Please God alone.

This is clear in Verse 10.

It is so easy to buckle under pressure,
The moment we are faced with opposition.
Or a tough choice.
We give in, simply because it's easier.

That is how peer pressure gets many of us in the end.
It is how bullying works.
It is how we buy into & swallow a secular vision for Sydney.
It is how people get trapped into Alcoholism.
It is how otherwise ordinary people do terrible things.

Like the way the colony treated the indigenous people of the land.
You can read about the treatment of Aboriginals in Dr Bolts work.
And how men like William Cowper became their advocates.

And it is most certainly why many of us simply stopped believing in Jesus.

Whatever happened to carrying the strength of one's convictions?
Whatever happened to?....

*"God give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and single eye, and
then let men or devils do their worst."*

Whatever happened to?....

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men?

Isn't that the only mindset to have to plough forward for 50 years in one place?

-- As Cowper did --
To endure such opposition?
To experience so much tragedy?
To work so hard? For so long?
And keep alive your passion?

To know, in the end, that you lived your life for God?
For a higher purpose?

Is today your day to recapture William Cowper's mind?

② Choose the Gospel alone.

The Apostle, worried about the legacy of Jesus in Galatia –
Minces no words.

V6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

Strong words.

Strong words here this morning.

But words on Cowper's heart that Sunday.

Neither the Apostle Paul, nor Cowper,

Believed these words because they were narrow.

Or somehow fit a conservative view of the world that suited them.

They believed that to change the Gospel was to destroy

The wonder and the beauty and the power and the grace

Of the one act of God that changed the world:

That Christ Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us.

To distort that Gospel:

Is to turn oxygen into Carbon Monoxide.

Is it to turn spring water into Sewerage.

It is to be 'eternally condemned'.

In Galatia, they were simply saying that faith in Christ

Wasn't enough.

But that they needed to get more kosher.

More Jewish.

More Law Driven.

And Paul was saying:

Jesus is enough to save you.

The Spirit is enough to transform you.

Choose that one Gospel.

Choose this day whom you will serve.

③ Believe in Grace alone.

V3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Pièce de résistance of God himself:

Is that his Grace is now offered
To a broken and divided world
His Peace is now available
To hearts in turmoil.

That is why Paul says: “Grace and Peace from God our Father.”

The means by which this Grace and Peace comes

Is through God’s only Son.

Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age...

God showed up in his this world in Rebellion.

We had overthrown God our Governor.

But had made a mess of this colony, which we do not own.

And one man showed up in the middle of that rebellion.

His name was Jesus.

His gave himself so I could live.

He gave himself to rescue Australia from an age of Evil.

Christ was Cowper’s Passion.

Christ was Cowper’s Legacy.

Passionate faith in Christ was Cowper’s fuel.

To live, and to love and to serve.

To meet prisoners on the way to the Gallows.

To defend the cause of Indigenous Australians.

To begin schools and champion education.

Cowper’s Children all contributed to that legacy.

William Macquarie in particular,

Who followed his father’s footsteps into ministry.

All driven by this Gospel.

-C.S. Lewis

"I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

That Gospel is like a Prism
As light comes onto the prism, it refracts,
Creating the colours of the rainbow.

That Christ
Gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age,
Changes how a person views every area of life.
And colours everything you do and say to the Glory of God.

Legacy:

What kind of Legacy will you leave to those you love?

I've been thinking about this for some weeks now.
Since I preach weekly in the parish in which William Cowper once served.

Legacies are about a relationship between the past and the future.

But they only have power in the Present.

They only have power in the NOW.

Legacy's is about the future remembering the past.
They are about the future living carefully in light of the past.

But their power is in the present.
Those now – who benefit and live by the light of those in the past.

That's why we say in the Present:
Lest we forget!

What kind of Legacy will I leave to those I love?

Today.

I have three kids all under 6.

What kind of legacy will I leave them?

I want them to contribute to society.

Sure, I want them strong and happy and healthy.

Sure, I would love to see them grow and marry and raise a family.

I have dear friends.

Neighbours.

Bothers, Sisters.

What kind of Legacy will I leave to those I love?

I want to leave them with Jesus.

Whom William Cowper loved.

Whom William Cowper served.

Faith in Jesus was daily bread for Cowper's soul.

Water for his life.

Lord of his decisions.

Backbone for his courage.

They say that on the day of his funeral.

Sydney Stopped.

A third of Sydney lined the streets of the Sydney to say Goodbye.

To keep his legacy.

And we stop today.

It is never too late to come to Christ.

I've just begun my work here at St Philips.

And I'm looking for help.

I'm looking for help done in faith and hope and love.

Contact me if you want to join us in continuing the Cowper legacy.

And to continue building the good work begun

In one Cowper 200 years ago,

That many of us today will work hard to maintain for another 200 years.