

## Life in the Spirit 2, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019 – ‘Children of the Spirit’ (Romans 8:1-17, Luke 10-21-24)

I don't know if you've learnt a language, but if you did – maybe at school, maybe for a holiday – then you probably started with these basic questions: who are you? Where do you live? And you'd have learnt the answers: Je m'appelle Matt. J'habite a Milton Keynes. Or ich heisse Matt. Or Me llamo Matt, or whatever. Then you'd have learnt to count to 10, and ask for directions to the train station, and so on.

My kids are doing Spanish GCSE and watching them do that it's struck me again how little actual useful language you learn. We went to Spain last year and *we* were ordering all the stuff in the cafe because they hadn't been taught how to wave over a waiter or ask for a menu or whatever.

But anyway, back to these basic questions – who are you, where do you live – I've been reading a great Christian book recently: it's just a simple devotional book with a short chapter each day, but it's been reminding me that there's two answers to those questions – who am I and where do I live. In the natural realm, I'm Matt and I live in Milton Keynes. But in the spiritual realm, as the book reminds me, who am I – I am Matt in whom Christ dwells by His Spirit, and where do I live: 'I live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God. **'I am Matt in whom Christ dwells and I live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God.'**

Who are you? Really, who are you? It's such a simple question, but actually trying to answer it is far more difficult for many of us than we realise. It might bring confusing or painful things to the surface – or maybe you just don't know. Some will say to me – I knew who I was 20 years ago, but I'm not sure now. I have a spiritual director, whom I meet every 2 months or so and we began our sessions 4 years ago with me saying: 'I'm not sure I know who I am at the moment. I'm approaching middle age, my kids are teenagers, I'm living somewhere new, with a new job and new responsibilities. My outward persona and my inner life feel disconnected. I knew who I was when I was 20, I knew who I was when I was in my early 30s – now it all feels up in the air again.'

Maybe you can resonate with that. But this very deep passage in Romans that we just read reminds us of a very simple truth at its heart. Who are you? You are a child of God in whom Christ's Spirit dwells and you live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God. As I said a couple of weeks ago – the older you get, life gets more complicated but faith gets more simple. God has *children*, and **the ultimate purpose of human existence is simply to live as God's child**: secure in his love, joyful and thankful, knowing the true life of the ultimate Father within us.

And to do all that, we need the Spirit. That's why I've put this talk into our series – to live as God's child is the most simple and most profound answer to human existence, it *is* the point, it is the goal of our being – but we can't do it on our own. Indeed we dare not do it on our own. *God is a Trinity because we need all 3 parts of him* – a Father to father us, a Son to save us and inspire us and to know as a friend and brother, and a Spirit to get us there in the first place. Let's look at what the Spirit does in this passage:

**Firstly, it gives life** – READv2. Jesus saves us but it's the Spirit that makes us alive! It's the Spirit who sets us free and helps us to feel that freedom in our hearts. It's the Spirit who turns that resurrection power into reality – READ v11. Many of you will know that I've spent much of my life in big city centre churches, most of which would be called 'happy clappy'. Now happy clappy is

usually one of those terms that's meant as an insult or a criticism when people use it – 'you don't go to one of those happy clappy churches do you?' As if being happy was really bad! I mean who wants to be happy? Who wants to feel alive? 'Well I certainly don't. Give me a cold slow demise anyday.' And that's what always tickles me – the idea that being happy was a really bad thing to aim at. I never had the courage to say it, but when people said that kind of thing to me, I always wanted to say, 'oh do you go to one of those sour dour churches?'

**Secondly, it directs** – READ v5-6. What has the power to direct our thoughts and desires toward good things? The Spirit. Paul is pretty blunt here – he doesn't just say you can't really change without the Spirit, not deep down – he says you can't be Christian full stop without the Spirit: READ v9. Now the good news is that God promises the Spirit to all who come to Christ, you don't have to work extra hard for it or earn it in some way. But the meaning is clear – we need the Spirit to be Christians and to become the kind of people God wants us to be. The Spirit is the power source, the battery pack if you will that energises our Christian life.

Can you be filled with the Spirit in a new way? Do you need to be? Some churches talk about that as being like a second stage to becoming a Christian, but I like to think of that question like *batteries*. When we become Christians we get standard batteries, but what we really want is to trade up to Duracells or Energisers. Being filled with the Spirit is like getting a better set of batteries. You've still got the power, but just a bit more of it. (Don't push that analogy too far, no image is perfect – but I like that one because it doesn't turn faith into a two stage experience.)

But the last amazing thing we learn in this passage in the most profound of all – **it is the Spirit that makes us God's children** – READ v14. Indeed it is the Spirit welling up in us that gives us that deep feeling of being God's children – READ v16. This is where it gets quite personal – how do we know that sense of being a child of God? Through what we believe, yes, but it does also help to feel it, doesn't it?

And people will feel it differently – but I hope for most of us that we have had moments when we've really felt it – maybe we've been praying or singing and we've just felt a deep love for God, a sense that we are close to Him, that we are his children. Or maybe it's been a profound silence or a stunning view and something clicks. And you know deep in your heart that you're loved, that you're special to God. That, my friends, is the Spirit at work. And if you've never felt that, then do pray for it today. I can't promise it will happen immediately, but it will come. And I think it's something we all need – the Christian life is *experienced*, we *feel* things and not just believe them or know them.

So who are we? We are children of God, in whom Christ dwells, and we live in the strong and unshakeable kingdom of God. And that means **we have a lot to look forward to** – READ v17a. Children inherit – and the promise is that all of us inherit not just God's presence here but also for eternity.

Friends we need the Spirit – to point us to Jesus, to bring us life, to direct our thoughts and desires, and above all to cry 'Father', to experience that deep intimacy with God. That is why we need the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity – I'm going to close by inviting God to come to each of us by His Spirit to do those things in us. **PRAY**