

## Matthew's weekly musing

### 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021

I've been musing on my attitude to God over the years.

Initially, (let's say before secondary school), he was a puzzle: "So there's an invisible person who wants me to be loyal to him?" That's the prep school voice.

Then the secondary school voice: I would loyally stick up for Him even though I had little understanding and no personal engagement with Him.

Then came a period of indifference, or should I say distraction? Indifference because I could not detect Him in my life. Distraction in that I was beginning a teaching career and a life of autonomy and new relationships.

In early adulthood came a period of searching for the mysterious presence, the one hinted at by my parents when I was young. I visited several churches but none of them helped, until I happened upon one which was (a) full of people of my age and (b) took God seriously and with enthusiasm.

For a period spanning a year of regular worship, my instinct for God grew and my knowledge of Him began to accumulate. Eventually head and heart came together, and I began to talk to Him, i.e. pray.

Now move forward to age 30 at theological college. I had opted for a college which assumed that the Holy Spirit was around and busy and accessible. (The other two colleges I tried seemed to think the HS was in retirement.)

I began to understand that it wasn't my attitude towards God that was significant, but God's attitude towards me. I'm amazed that I remained so egocentric for so long.

I do sympathise with myself. My entry into Christianity had been to do with forgiveness for sin, with the vital event of Good Friday and the eternity-granting gift of the resurrection. The expression "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" was a kind of intellectual truth that hadn't grabbed my feelings.

I had been in a kind of contract with God rather than a relationship. This needed to change.

A key moment came in college chapel, when someone was given the heroic task of reading the beginning of Ephesians - I've put it at the end of this musing. I say heroic because in the translation he was using it was one long sentence. He brilliantly brought the passage to life, and I had a moment of illumination that changed my engagement with God from then on.

I realized God's attitude towards me was remarkable. In the passage below I've underlined some of the words which helped me see things from God's point of view. I'll list them:

- Chosen
- Adopted
- Redeemed
- Gathered
- Sealed

I was warmed and encouraged. These relational words opened the way for me to relate to God as Father; for me know Jesus as friend rather than hero; for me to invite the Holy Spirit to work in me and through me.

There are other metaphors for describing how we engage with God, which for me were less helpful eg Converted, Born Again or Washed in the Blood. But Chosen, Adopted, Redeemed, Gathered and Sealed really helped me.

I hope you enjoy reading the verses. On re-reading I'm grabbed by v.3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." The blessings aren't essentially to do with my lifestyle, or life-successes, or life-choices. They are in "the heavenly places", meaning that the greatest blessing I can receive is in my connection with God the Father.

### **Ephesians, chapter 1**

- 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.
- 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
- 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
- 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup> so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.
- 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup> this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people.