

# 7 July 2019

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity



**2 Kings 5 vv1-14**

**Galatians 6 vv7-16**

**Luke 10 vv1-11, 16-20**

In his letter to the church in Galatia, which we call the letter to the Galatians, Paul writes about a controversy over whether or not new-comers, non-Jewish men who wanted to be Christians should first be circumcised. In fact, become members of the Jewish community and only then, be baptised into the Christian Church. Paul criticises such people saying **“they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh.”** Yuk! I feel the need to cross my legs!!

Such an idea leaves me with a deep sense of unease. Do you know what I mean? It is suggestive that even here, in the cradle of the church, there are people, men actually, who have doubtful motives, and possibly, abusive desires?

So what was this thing that they were joining? What was their concept of membership... sports club, political party, secret society, etc. I think that we have the same issues today about what the church is really for.

Let us remember that the disciples called by Jesus were not very special nor popular nor powerful, nor rich. Some were simple fishermen, one was a tax collector, none of them were rich or famous, but ordinary and unremarkable people... just like us.

And they weren't being invited to be part of an elite, or even to believe in a set of rules.

They were invited to follow Jesus. At the time, they didn't really understand but they found the invitation attractive...attractive enough to give up their ordinary lives and follow him, literally, physically, for three years, learning from him day by day, step by step, as they went throughout the land, from town to town.

They did not expect it all to lead to his arrest, trial and crucifixion... but it did. It was a shock, and to be honest, the shock still lingers in our own discipleship.

So, going back to those applicants for membership of the early church in Galatia, what does it mean to be baptised? In another part of the letter to the Galatians, we read that when you are baptised,

**“As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”**

But what sort of clothing is this?

In the orthodox church, baptism is undertaken when the candidate is naked. In some places, the same baptismal robe is used through different generations. In some churches, the child is re-dressed after baptism, in new clothes. These are symbols of being clothed with Christ... But what does this mean?

St. Paul explains what this means in chapter 3 of Galatians:

There is no longer Jew nor Greek,  
there is no longer slave nor free,  
there is no longer male and female;  
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3: 28)

What an inspiring and inspired bit of writing! What this means is that when we become one, that is united with Christ, we transcend our ordinary life and we are caught up in a new vision... a vision which we see displayed so graphically in the life and death of Jesus Christ. This vision is full of promise and commitment. Included are such qualities as:-

endurance	we never give up hope
love	we love because we are loved
unity	we don't allow things to divide us from other people
truth	we know that this is the only good basis for human living
justice	we know that this is what God's kingdom is like

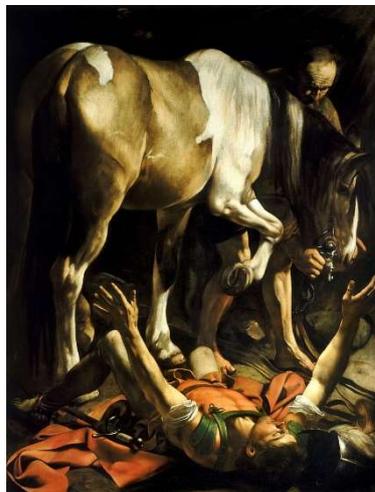
It means that we never rule out possibilities, that there are always alternatives, that there is deepest hope, even and especially in the face of death.

This is the clothing in which we dress and go out to face the world, as Christian people, confident in what Jesus did and does for us, and confident in his closeness and support, day by day. As Paul writes in Galatians, chapter 6:

**<sup>14</sup> May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**

**<sup>15</sup> For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!**

**<sup>16</sup> As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.”**



Paul on the Damascus Road  
by Caravaggio (1571-1610)