

Hello everyone,

Like disciple of all times we are asked to spread the good news to the ends of the earth. The good news is Jesus Christ himself and where do we look to find out about this good news?

Well we look in the bible specifically the New testament, maybe the gospels.

But what about if you didn't have the bible to help you, how would you get on?

It might be difficult you'd find yourself putting together snippets people had told you and weaving it into a narrative

A story to tell.

Maybe that's the position Paul found himself after his conversion where Jesus appeared to him and convinced him there was a message to tell. He had no New Testament to refer to.

Yes, we know, because the bible tells us so, that Paul spent time with the disciples before he set off preaching in earnest.

And Yes, Paul knew his scripture, that's what we call the Old Testament, very deeply.

But he was off to spread the news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

How would you approach that?

How did he do it?

Luke tells us that he had a very ordered approach to his preaching. Luke tells us he goes from town to town preaching. At the start of chapter 17, Luke tells us in a verse or two that Paul travels about 100 miles to Thessalonica after which Paul goes onto many other places like Corinth Athens and Ephesus.

Luke tells us that on reaching a city, Paul goes to the synagogue to preach. If he can't find a synagogue then he looks for places where God fearers gather. For example the river bank in Philippi.

He preaches first to the Jews and only after that to the Gentiles according to Luke, but Luke may be ordering his little snippets of information to tell his own story.

After a while in a city Paul moves on or is asked to leave and repeats the process at the next city.

But we know that Paul did not forget the people who he's spread the news to. He might be miles away but most of our knowledge of Paul comes from the letters

he wrote to friends he had made in cities all over the region. Paul remains a leader, a pastor and theologian to all the churches he founded.

We call his messages, letters. They were sent with messengers to the churches, but it seems they were to be read out. Paul makes this very clear in his letter to Philemon. He addresses it to his dear friend Philemon and to the church in your house. This is clearly a note to be shared.

It seems that Paul led all sorts of types of churches from a house church with Philemon to churches like the one in Corinth which was established enough to have developed divisions and needed pastoral help.

As we read Paul's letters, we find him sometimes having to deal with the same question from more than one place. For example at Corinth and Thessalonica he seems to have to deal with what happens after a Christian dies. Sometimes he builds on teaching he has given them before like in the Corinthian letters and at other times it seems to be questions about teaching he has not shared like in Thessalonians.

Through Paul's letters and Luke's history of his work spreading the message we get little glimpses of

moments of joy and moments of anxiety. But what did he preach when it came to spreading the message.

The overall aim of being a Christian seems to be about becoming more Christlike.

And what does more Christ like mean?

For Paul, it flows from the story of the Old testament. There is only one true and living God. That's a common claim made against the many Roman and Greek gods of the time.

Jesus was the son of God. Again, that means that the emperor cannot be the son of God as claimed by some.

God was angry with the way the people in the world treated each other.

Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead by God.

Jesus would return to rescue those loyal to him.

Taken together it means that Jesus is central to everything and offers us hope with his father and the Holy spirit all of whom have unique characteristics, but all of whom are just one God. Paul doesn't actually mention the trinity, but the idea is in all he says.

Maybe you see the very modern feel to Paul's moments of anxiety and joy as he goes preaching this message. It has a real feel of the moment of today about it.

The joy that we can now go out a bit more and the joy that we can now start to plan the re-opening of the East church sits beside the anxiety that many feel about being with people and wondering just how will we plan to keep social distancing in our very large building.

The joy that we soon hope to give the universal welcome and praise in the church building is balanced by the anxious recognition that not all may feel able to attend to start with and will still rely on other ways of gathering as church.

The simple joy of gathering together, but the anxiety of maintaining social distancing, wearing facemasks in the church and remembering not to shake hands.

So given this mix of anxiety and joy, how might Paul preach the message of Jesus if he sent Banchory East a letter?

What do you think?

What would he say?

Which part of Jesus story would he pick out?

First and foremost we can be absolutely sure that he would put Jesus absolutely in the centre of it all.

For Paul Jesus is the light of God shining on everything a bit like the way Rembrandt uses light in his pictures to highlight certain features and place other parts in shadows. Just look at his adoration of the shepherds and you can see how he does that.

But Paul might refer us back to his letter to the church at Rome. So, stand up and read aloud his ideas of hope from Romans.

Hope doesn't disappoint us, he writes

It doesn't disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

What we need to do is surround our moments of joy and anxiety with that idea of hope as we continue to spread God's message not just through words but in actions too as we plan what the East church will look like in the coming months.

Peace be with you.            Amen