

Reflection Wednesday 15th March

Galatians 1:13-24

¹³You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. ¹⁴I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; ¹⁹but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, ²²and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; ²³they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

"You have heard, no doubt....." and Paul goes on to tell of his story as he saw it. How many had heard part of his story with false bits added? We are used to hearing the term "fake news" these days and as we follow the events around Ukraine and Russia we are aware that the story told from one side is different from that of the other. The other side are telling "fake news" is the cry from both sides.

I am convinced that over the years we have all been responsible for sharing fake news, maybe deliberately or unintentionally for we have all at some stage told lies.

As Church have we told lies about Jesus, maybe not deliberately, but expressing things from our perspective, from our position, for our own looking good may have coloured the message?

Telling the Jesus story, alongside our story, is of importance; it was what Paul was trying to get across. The truth of Jesus is much clearer seen in transformed life than words of argument and debate. Paul had been a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. He had an overwhelming experience on the way to Damascus that changed everything for him. His commitment to the way of Jesus, which followed, took him through some difficult and dangerous times but he continued to seek to do what he felt called to do. There were times of doubt as opposition from "believers" came his way.

In this passage he is explaining his situation to the Galatians as some there saw him as a minor apostle who was just a mouthpiece for the Judean believers and apostles and he had then taken to distorting the message of Jesus.

His story was that he had a commission from God and the message he shared was from God, and that rather than being a despised false teacher, the Judean apostles gave glory to God for how one who had been a great persecutor had become a great follower of the way of Jesus.

What is your story? With whom have you shared it? How has your life been changed, transformed and transfigured through your encounter with Jesus?

Sometimes some Christians are disappointed by their story for it is not a story of "rags to riches" in Jesus, "prison to pulpit" or something else that can have a "glamorous" feel to it. A number with that glamorous story of the great life transforming encounter would wish the great transformation had not been necessary, that their life had not been such a mess and that they had just known Jesus without the grotty past.

So what is your story of life with Jesus, not 40 years ago but in this period of 40 days in Lent? Reflect on how you are being transformed and guided.

We often hear preachers say they look forward to the day when they hear the words "well done good and faithful servant."

I wonder how many of us would like, without pride, to say, "And they glorified God because of me"? What are you doing about it?

