

Sunday 10th February 2019 - Promise Centred - Galatians 3.26-4.31

I'd like to introduce you to Marie Kondo from Japan.

If you've not come across her yet, as diminutive as she is, she's taken America and the Netflix channel by storm, and Radio 4 programming has been obsessed with her. Her books and her TV programmes are about decluttering your home. But it's more than just tidying up. She teaches her Konmarie method of sorting through everything in a particular order and storing and reordering things in a particular way.

Marie rings the doorbell of the most unlikely of homes, and you see the anxiety, the stress and the relationships which are faltering because stuff has taken over: clothes, memorabilia, and collections of one sort or another have become overwhelming and people don't know what to do... Until Marie helps them get to work decluttering and reordering... And it transforms homes, families and relationships...

Have to confess, it also seems to be helping when you are imminently moving house and deciding what's not coming with you.

As Paul writes to the Galatians, he is decluttering all the stuff which threatens to overwhelm their faith and witness, and debuking those who have 'thrown them into confusion'.

Paul says:

- Remember the Gospel - you are loved, rescued, redeemed!
- Realise you don't need to conform to Jewish laws and customs to know Jesus and belong to the Church!
- Recognise it's faith and grace that save, not rigidly obeying the law and relying on your own works!

And just as Marie Kondo, declutters homes and puts families back in touch with each other and reminds them of their relationships, so Paul is trying to declutter the church and put the Galatians back in touch with who they are! And whose they are...

And that really comes to a climax at the end of chapter 3 and the start of chapter 4. You might say the heart of the letter, when Paul writes: **3.26 You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus...**

Paul takes them back to their truest identity/sense of who they are.

Because they are children of God they are heirs! They inherit the Kingdom of God, the promises of eternal life, citizens of heaven. So much more than slaves.

They belong to God. His children. We are family. And having made this announcement in verse 26 of chapter 3, Paul spends some time reflecting on it in the next few verses, allowing the truth to sink in...

4 But when the [set] time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption as God's children. 6 Because you

are his children [sons], he sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'

Through Jesus Christ we are family - we are adopted. One of our congregation who was preaching this morning described part of the story of adopting their youngest child and becoming their forever mummy and daddy. God adopts us and he is our forever Father.

To make the point, Paul talks of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of his Son) being sent into our hearts so that we might call God 'Abba Father'. Abba is a term of intimacy a child would use of their father.

It's the term Jesus uses when praying to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane - at that extreme moment of desolation: ***Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'*** [Mark 14.35-36]

Paul doesn't just want this to be knowledge, he wants this to be the Galatian's experience. Something for them to depend upon. Not resorting to rules and regulations, not just relying on their own efforts. This is a relationship to fall back on, to fall back *into*: Abba Father! This is a relationship we are given - we do not earn!

How come we can so easily lose this wonderful invitation and truth! ***3.26 You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus...***

Let's pause for a moment to pray as we sing:
*Hallelujah, my Father, for giving us Your Son;
Sending Him into the world, to be given up for us.
Knowing we would bruise Him and smite Him from the earth.
Hallelujah, my Father, in His death is my birth;
Hallelujah, my Father, in His life is my life.*

When you invite Marie Kondo into your home to declutter your life, she starts with your clothes! You have to get all your clothes out and put them on your bed and then work through what you want to keep and what you're going to bin or send to the charity shop...

As he declutters the Galatians misperceptions, Paul too starts with clothes - specifically one item:

26 You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Choosing clothes can be important - it's an active, daily, decision what we wear - I know, I have three daughters! We are clothed with Christ. We have that tradition of wearing white at baptisms or confirmations. Or putting on your Sunday best. All of it is a pale shadow of the truth that we are clothed with Christ! At baptism we decide to put on Christ - every day.

That's what's most important!! As children of God we need to be dressed properly! And this is so important, because it supersedes cultural differences (Jew and Greek), it overcomes

economic divides (slave and free), and it's more significant than gender identity (male and female): **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

Where cultural differences (even just within CofE) can divide, where economics can be divisive (north/south divide), where gender politics divides, Jesus Christ brings us together!

Jesus is what brings us together!

When Marie Kondo asks people to sort out their clothes, her categories might surprise you. When you are working through your mountain of clothes, the question you are meant to ask as you lift up each item is simply this: does it SPARK JOY for you?

Things that spark joy are kept everything else is to be given or thrown away.

JOY is a key concept for her decluttering methods.

And JOY is so important for Paul too. He has reminded the Galatians that they are children of God. He reminds them that they are clothed in Christ. And then comes a devastating question: **15 What has happened to all your joy?**

Paul becomes autobiographical again (as he did in chapter 2), reminding them of when they took him in when he was ill. And the joy and exuberance of their welcome and embrace of him.

But now, misguided in their fixation on the law, on rules and regulations he asks: **What has happened to all your joy?**

And isn't that what happens to all of us when rules become more important, when targets take over and our performance is key, when we measure success by our achievements. Obedience to rules and regulations squeezes out joy and replaces it with anxiety, that we're not doing as well as we should. Not praying hard enough, not witnessing well enough, not reading our Bible regularly enough, not loving, serving, praising, thanking, fasting, trusting, reading as we think we should.

I remember as a teenage Christian struggling with prayers and quiet times and being told its not about feeling guilty its about feeling hungry - hungry for God, hungry for relationship with God. God is always there ready for us. It's grace. Paul keeps turning the Galatians back to grace: **9 But now that you know God – or rather [more importantly] are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!**

Be hungry not guilty! Paul longs for them to rediscover their joy! To rely on grace and faith not law and works!! **19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!**

And Paul goes back to the story of Abraham. He's already reminded them they are Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise...

But the story of Hagar and Sarah which Paul draws on now is a dark episode in the Abraham narrative and a devastating reminder of what happens when people don't rely on faith.

God promised Abraham and Sarah a son. But because they were too old, Abraham and Sarah took God's promise into their own hands and Abraham slept with Hagar their slave...That ended in disaster, broken relationships, anxiety, enmity and suspicion. Because they relied on their own efforts rather than rely on God's promise...

So Paul reminds the Galatians: **28 Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.** Promise because we trust in God. And in his ways, and in his grace we find a joy that rules and regulations, law and works cannot deliver.

Today, will we allow our faith to be decluttered by these two simple truths?

26 You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

27 all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Let's pause, and pray as we sing:

Hallelujah, my Father, for giving us Your Son;

Sending Him into the world, to be given up for us.

Knowing we would bruise Him and smite Him from the earth.

Hallelujah, my Father, in His death is my birth;

Hallelujah, my Father, in His life is my life.