



Sermon Questions from 13.09.20: The Fragrance of Christ

Focusing on 2 Cor 2: 14-16

Thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved, and those who are perishing. To the one, we are an aroma that brings death, to the other, an aroma that brings life.

Background

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church had a painful and tricky history. He has had to rebuke the church in the past and is far from sure of how things are going there. He arrives in Troas desperate to see Titus and find out the news from Corinth. He cannot settle or take advantage of the opportunity presented to him. He then bursts out in this reminder of Christ's glorious victory parade, reminding us that Jesus has conquered sin and death and hell and always has the end, from the beginning.

Triumphal procession

William Barclay describes a typical procession thus:

In a Triumph the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the senate. Then came the trumpeters. Then were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem, the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shew-bread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then came the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After that came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre with the Roman eagle at its top, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him rode his family; and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting Io triumphs! their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, amid the cheering crowds, it made a tremendous day which might happen only once in a lifetime.

<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/2-corinthians-2.html>

1. What does this tell us about Christ's victory and our place in that victory?

Paul here is making a point about casual triumphal Christianity.... We are not those in power, we are not those in control, we are not the trumpeters but the captives, the ones who are in the procession probably in chains, looking pretty shabby and facing their imminent execution...

2. Can people recognise us as ones who are surrendered, as captives of Christ?

Metaphors

Paul is the master of the metaphor. He mixes them up like a DJ mixes tunes, and reading them is like looking through a kaleidoscope, as you keep going, keep turning, the patterns emerge and understanding grows. Notice how our place in this word-picture moves from captives, to priests, to the aroma itself.

1. What is that smell? - the fragrance of Christ?

Why is it a pleasing aroma? (Gen 8 v21) How can fragrance be a sign of wrongs being put right?

Notice the order that the phrases are in.

...the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved, and those who are perishing.

To the one, we are an aroma that brings death, to the other, an aroma that brings life.

Why does it smell different, to different people?

2. How can I smell like that?

- Quiet times v noisy times?
- Rule of life, or trellis; reminders throughout the day to practice the presence of Christ?
- (sometimes painful) process of surrender
- Saying yes to Jesus, even under pressure and hardship.

3. How can I spread that smell?

5 marks of mission:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

....what does being the fragrance of Christ look like for me? In which areas am I challenged to be the fragrance of Christ?

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