

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2022**  
**The Third Sunday before Lent**  
**Evensong**

**Collect**

Eternal God,  
whose Son went among the crowds  
and brought healing with his touch:  
help us to show his love,  
in your Church as we gather together,  
and by our lives as they are transformed  
into the image of Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Hosea 10:1-8, 12**

Israel is a luxuriant vine  
that yields its fruit.  
The more his fruit increased  
the more altars he built;  
as his country improved,  
he improved his pillars.  
Their heart is false;  
now they must bear their guilt.  
The Lord will break down their altars,  
and destroy their pillars.

For now they will say:  
'We have no king,  
for we do not fear the Lord,  
and a king—what could he do for us?'  
They utter mere words;  
with empty oaths they make covenants;  
so litigation springs up like poisonous weeds  
in the furrows of the field.  
The inhabitants of Samaria tremble  
for the calf of Beth-aven.  
Its people shall mourn for it,  
and its idolatrous priests shall wail over it,  
over its glory that has departed from it.  
The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria  
as tribute to the great king.  
Ephraim shall be put to shame,  
and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

Samaria's king shall perish  
like a splinter on the face of the waters.

The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,  
shall be destroyed.  
Thorn and thistle shall grow up  
on their altars.  
They shall say to the mountains, Cover us,  
and to the hills, Fall on us.

Sow for yourselves righteousness;  
reap steadfast love;  
break up your fallow ground;  
for it is time to seek the Lord,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

### **Galatians 4:8-20**

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What has become of the goodwill you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them. It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

## Sermon

There is something about this evening's reading from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians that makes me think about the way both our head and our heart might be involved in our faith. I wonder whether you can identify whether head or heart is most significant for you in your faith journey.

Let me try to explain what I mean. Whether we were brought up going to church from our childhood, and have never really left, or have joined the church later in life, the factors that keep us coming back probably have something to do with both the head and the heart. On the "head" side, we might be able to identify courses that have had a big impact in convincing us of something about God. Perhaps learning more about the Bible has been crucial; or finding out about the story of Jesus. Maybe hearing something about the faith that the Church teaches has really had an impact; has changed the way that you see the world.

On the "heart" side, you may have had one or many profound faith experiences. Or it may be a little more subtle – you just feel at peace when you come to church; or you feel uplifted by services; or you find the company of others comforting. Perhaps you can't really explain why it is that you come to church, but week by week, something seems to draw you back.

For most of us, our faith involves a combination of head and heart. And we find something rather similar in St. Paul's letters. There are convincing arguments in which he sets out deep theological ideas. The letter to the Romans is perhaps the most complete example of this – it probably contains the most coherent explanation of Paul's faith. But we find plenty of other examples throughout his various letters, as he sets out his understanding of Christ and what Christ came to do. Yet one of the compelling aspects of Paul's letters is his tendency to get exasperated with his readers, and blurt things out which are responses to his emotions, rather than fully thought through arguments. This letter to the Galatians is full of references to "you foolish Galatians" as he simply loses his rag.

This evening's reading falls into two parts. In the first, we hear Paul setting out an argument. The Galatians were becoming divided among themselves over the question of circumcision. There were those who wanted to insist that all Christians should be circumcised, effectively becoming Jews in order to become Christians. In a sense they were creating a two-tier system of Christianity, with the superior Christians being circumcised.

Paul sets out his argument. There is nothing wrong with circumcision – or indeed any other Jewish practice. However, none of these are now necessary. So if people haven't been circumcised, they do not need to be. And if they have, that's fine, too. What makes them all Christians is that they know God through Jesus. Indeed it is a relationship with God, rather than following particular religious practices, that matters.

Paul ends his argument with the words: "I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted." And it is at this point that he switches from head to heart. He appeals to the Galatians as friends; as people he knows and has spent time with. He speaks of the relationships they have built. He expresses his own vulnerability, reminding them of his own state when he first met them, and how they took him in and looked after him. He expresses his pain at the way these, his friends, are now behaving.

One of the great frustrations of the scriptures, especially with St. Paul's letters, is that we can surmise that there were letters written by the communities back to Paul, and yet we do not have them. We have to guess at the way in which Paul's letters were received. The questions that they raised. The ways that the communities responded.

We can imagine, though, that they will have been received differently by each individual. That some will have been won over by a convincing argument, while others will have been moved by the personal appeals. And it helps us to remember that our own faith journeys involve both head and heart. It can be worth asking ourselves at times when our faith feels particularly hard whether what would help most would be to read something that stimulates our mind; or whether what we need more is to connect with our emotions, perhaps through music, prayer or silence.

God made us as complete beings – with both head and heart. Our faith will be deepened by remembering to engage both.

Amen

