

If you were to draw up a list of the qualities you would look for in a person you could admire almost without reservation, what would they include? And what sort of characteristics would we regard as unattractive?

Well, Paul gives us a very good idea of both ends of the spectrum, doesn't he, in this well-known passage from Galatians that Ian has just read for us. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Who wouldn't love to be known as having all those virtues or even just a few?

What a sharp contrast to the vices Paul lays out in the three previous verses— sexual immorality, impurity, hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, dissension, envy, idolatry, sorcery, drunkenness and wild parties.

And yet, in a sense, they both stem from the same root – freedom. As verse 1 says, For freedom Christ has set us free, or as Tom Wright puts it, the Messiah set us free so that we could enjoy freedom. Not that Jesus set us free for the purposes of indulging ourselves in those rather disagreeable characteristics that Paul sets before us, but God has given us free will to choose His way or the world's way, and sadly far too many people still choose the world's way.

Now it would be downright foolishness on my part to claim that Christians have a monopoly on the positive qualities outlined by Paul. But I would suggest that anyone who consistently displays many of them has, in effect, chosen God's way, whether they realise it or not, whether they admit it or not. And we should rejoice when we meet them, because quite frankly they are doing a better job at living the full and abundant life that Jesus offers than many professing Christians.

As Paul says, there is no law against such things. The whole point of his letter to the Galatians is to remind them not to get hung up on the minutiae of Jewish law, the outside signs of compliance with the law such as the requirement for circumcision or a ban on eating certain foods. Jesus has moved things on from there. The law that Jesus came to fulfil down to the last detail is contained in the two great commandments to love God with all our heart and all our mind and all our strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves. That's it, nothing more, nothing less.

And as we have seen over the last few weeks, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to help us do that. And as Paul reminds us, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are the fruit of the Spirit living in us. The thing is we can't make fruit, we can help it grow and mature, but we can't create it. Spiritual fruit comes from a life of faith that is germinated and nourished by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't come from our own efforts, it isn't even a reward or a merit badge for doing good deeds. But fruit can perish.

And the fruit of the Spirit can perish too if it's just left on display, it has to be shared with others.

All of which is why Come Holy Spirit is such an important prayer, because without the Holy Spirit there will be no fruit of the kind Paul talks about. The point is that the person who exhibits the fruit of the Spirit is fulfilling the law far better than someone who observes the rituals but doesn't have love in their heart.

Selwyn Hughes, the great Welsh evangelist of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, said Paul's ordering of the fruit of the Spirit was deliberate in that you can't have joy without love, that you need love and joy to have peace and so on right through the list.

But for people to see those qualities in us requires us to go on a journey, a journey from where we were when we asked Jesus into our lives to where the full effects of that decision become apparent. To a greater or lesser extent we will be transformed, but in any event we will not be the same people we were when we set out on our quest.

Which brings us to our Gospel reading. It marks the start of what scholars call Luke's Travel Narrative, where Jesus leaves the life he knew in Galilee and starts his journey to the Cross. He leaves as a prophet and arrives as the Messiah. His followers are transformed from bystanders and disciples and apostles, and it is no accident that Luke was the first to call the early Christian movement The Way, to emphasise that Christianity is not something static but rather dynamic, it's about people discovering their true identity and purpose while on the move.

And any journey can involve trials and tribulations. Think of what Afghan, Syrian or Ukrainian refugees have been going through these last few years. Just as Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, in his case knowingly to his death, so those refugees have set their face to find safety and hopefully a better life. As a refugee and a homeless person himself, Jesus knows what they are having to go through.

Interestingly, given Jews and Samaritans mutually distrusted and disliked each other, Jesus chooses to go straight through Samaria rather than skirt round it as many Jews did, and when, unsurprisingly, Jesus and his disciples find themselves unwelcome, James and John have a serious case of the 1<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of road rage and suggest calling down fire from heaven to wipe those ungracious Samaritans off the face of the earth. Naturally Jesus rejects, in very strong terms, their call for violence and vengeance.

No more hate, no more revenge, no more retaliation. James and John may have heard Jesus proclaiming that before, but hearing a truth and seeing it in action are two very different things. Seeing love in action can often have a very powerful effect.

Loving and forgiving everyone, especially those pesky Samaritans or the hated Romans may not have seemed realistic to the disciples then, any more than loving and forgiving our

modern-day enemies seem realistic to us today, but Jesus is clear it is the only way to the full and abundant life that Jesus promises and that the fruit of the Spirit exemplifies.

When we go on a journey of transformation, as we are invited to by Jesus, we need signposts to follow. And Jesus is big on following, isn't he? Jesus never says worship me, but he regularly says follow me. And as Jesus makes crystal clear in our Gospel reading, following Him is more important than anything else, even worshipping God. But it's following Jesus on his terms, not on ours as he makes abundantly clear to his three would-be followers who on the face of it have good reasons to say I'll follow shortly.

Why is Jesus so big on us following him? Well, maybe because too big a focus on worshipping Jesus, worshipping God, turns Jesus and God into a religion, which then turns into a question of who's in and who's out, what specific doctrines we believe and so on. Of course, I'm not saying worshipping God is not important, after all that's why we gather every week in church.

But following Jesus is more than just belonging and believing. Following Jesus and loving God with all our heart, mind and soul and loving our neighbour as ourselves will bring about transformation and lead us ultimately into union with God.

And transformation means change. And changing is harder than maintaining the status quo, which is what religion often does. Change means leaving things behind like quarrels and anger and dissension so that we can do justice, love mercy and walk humbly by sharing love, spreading joy, waging peace, fostering patience, nurturing kindness, exhibiting generosity, seeking faithfulness, cultivating goodness and trying to be more self-controlled.

That's what following is about. Jesus' response to the two who offered to follow him once they had settled their domestic affairs may sound harsh to our ears, but surely it is only to emphasise that we can't be half-hearted about following Jesus and still hope for transformation.

I'm not sure Jesus would get very far as a salesman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There's no slick packaging, no effort to minimise the cost, nothing is hidden in the small print. Not for Jesus a neat, orderly, comfortable, stable life. And if that's the sort of life we want, then maybe Jesus isn't for us. After all, look at Jesus' selling points in this passage, rejection, hardship, disruption and urgency. Not all very attractive, are they?

If we want people to see the fruit of the Spirit working in our lives to the point of wanting it for themselves, then we need to be transformed and if we want to be transformed we have to do more than belong and believe, we have to follow – all-in.