

Colossians 2: 6 – 15

'Helpful routine or Damaging Superstition?'

When asked about: **'What the British do well'** in a recent survey ... one answer that came back was ... **Queueing.**

Generally speaking in this country, people form what is considered to be an orderly queue and such is the strength of culture that few people get away with 'barging in'.

But if you travel – it quickly becomes clear that other cultures don't share our assumption that there's only one way to queue.

Perhaps this can alert us – especially if we tend to assume our way is the right way – perhaps this can alert us to pay close attention to the teaching in our epistle.

Epistle Warning ...

'See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.'

In our time, our country, our culture ... the phrase we most need to pay attention to, I think, is: ***'according to human tradition.'***

The British culture – and not only about queueing – often pushes us towards there being only one 'proper way' to do things ... but Paul warns us against being caught up in human traditions.

There isn't only one way to queue, to dress for a church service, to arrange a dinner table, to set up the candles, to write a letter ... or whatever. No one place to sit in church. No one way to receive communion. There are traditional ways, yes ... but keeping to them doesn't earn us 'brownie points' from God, doesn't set us above those who do things differently ... and can sometimes start to limit or harm us ... **horoscopes etc.** Although we do need to recognise that those of us with some form of OCD do need to be in control of how things are done.

But generally we need to be able to discern what human traditions, habits, ways have a good basis in either what is Christ-like or what is genuinely helpful ... and what can easily be followed or not ... they are 'indifferent' in that sense ... and what have become redundant.

And just as important – we need to review our own attitudes and how we react, how we come across to others about the human traditions, the rituals, the habits that we tend to follow.

Because for us being **Christian Disciples** – as in the opening words of today's epistle – our security, freedom and wellbeing come from being rooted and then built up in our relationship with Jesus ... our time spent with him ... our security, freedom and wellbeing don't come from sticking to – or promoting – mere human traditions but from being ...

Rooted in Jesus ...

Both our Church schools have now adopted this theme of being rooted in Jesus as being core to how they operate.

So it's worth us thinking a bit more about what it means to be rooted in Jesus ... a bit more about 'roots' in general.

We're probably all aware that it's primarily the roots of a plant which have the task of bringing water and nutrients to the rest of the plant. As Christians, this links back strongly to **John 15** and Jesus' words about our need to '**abide in him**' ... spend time with him, get to know him, have our whole being shaped by him.

But I came across something about roots recently that was new to me. Apparently there is evidence that plants also use their roots to communicate with other plants. They alert each other through secreting chemicals and this enables them to share the environment more productively.

That's a good fact to ponder on – being rooted in Christ is never just about our own well-being ... but is about the flourishing of other people too.

Conclusion ... So if we put both parts of what we've been thinking about this morning together, linking verses 6, 7 and 8 of Colossians 2:

Being rooted in Christ is key.

This rootedness ensures our security, freedom and wellbeing as individuals ...

but it also contributes to the flourishing of others.

As soon as any of our human traditions, habits or rituals interfere with any Christ-like attitudes or start to replace our rootedness, or have a bad or belittling effect on others, they have become a burden or stumbling block and we need either to sit lightly to them or to get rid of them completely.

Concluding Example ...

I started with the example of queuing I'm going to finish with a story from my Vet days:

When I was training – I 'saw practice' during the supposed holidays in a local vet practice – a family firm – already in the 3rd generation. One lady – not a vet – had worked there for decades and she told me how to set up the consulting room. She was very particular that the water for injections, certain antibiotics and cotton wool had to be lined up along the work top. And woe betide you if you didn't do it – you felt the displeasure!

It seemed odd to me and counter-productive ... getting in the way most of the time. As I gained a bit more confidence, I asked around discreetly about why. It turned out that – about 40 years before – one of the founding members of the practice had not been able to reach the place where these items had been kept – following a run-in with a bull – and various long-term injuries ...

And so these commonly used items were put out for him ... who had not worked there for at least **25 years!**

Whether at home, work, church – or wherever let's not fall into the same trap or follow that particular example!