

Second Sunday after Easter 2022 – Pastor DJK
01/05/2022

“Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17 CEV)

It's post Easter and things are different for the early Christians – things are different for us.

The early church grew in “numbers and in strength”

Do we want to grow in “numbers and in strength”?

The early church grew out of experiences. As we heard today Saul became Paul because of the Damascus road experience. Saul the murderer of Christians became Paul the evangelist because of a “bright light experience” on a back road. Imagine if a Saul came here today and said he saw Jesus in a bright light on back road – what would we think?

Paul wrote over a third of the New Testament – Paul who held the coats of those stoning Steven wrote what we call God's Holy word. That Damascus road experience – has changed the world.

All of Paul's writings, God's word, are based on his experiences with the risen Lord Jesus.

Now he and we experience the risen Lord Jesus through people. Remember Jesus prayer before Easter – *“Father let them be in us – I am in you and you are in me – let them be in us”*. John 17. If I want to see Jesus in the flesh I look in your eyes – If I want to experience the body of Jesus I come here to his body – the church.

What do people experience when they come here?

Is it love at first sight?

We inherited a dog that was abused – when I came home he could tell if I was tired, or grumpy, or unhappy in a flash.

If he didn't see love in my eyes at first sight he would disappear – no kidding he would go missing for weeks – from one look in my eyes. He knew tired eyes, grumpy eyes, angry eyes, mean abuse.

Now I have 2 whippets – these are the first dogs I have ever had from pups that are exclusively mine.

They have never heard a cross word – when I come home they are jumping up and down like you wouldn't believe – spoilt rotten.

They follow me wherever I go. Sometimes I walk around and around to see what they would do – they follow me around and around – and look at me stupidly.

Whippet's feel the cold. If I'm out in the cold chopping wood or something they sit and watch shivering. If I'm working in the shed they love to sit in the ute and watch me.

They have only ever experienced love.

Paul says, This church is the body of Christ – the body of Christ is love.

Paul says: *"Anyone who belongs to this church is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new."*

This church is the place of experiences.

Paul's churches grew in "numbers and strength".

The church is the place where we experience Jesus – where we experience his love.

Now I'll bet you anything you like that many of you – all of you at some time – come here for experiences but only the experiences you want.

I want to experience hymns.

I want to experience modern songs.

I want to experience liturgy and tradition.

I want to experience informality.

I'll bet you anything that many of you – all of you at some time – would rather experience exactly what you want in preference to Jesus love.

My Whippets will sit by me while I chop wood in the freezing cold, shivering, getting hit by the occasional piece of flying wood – they wouldn't be anywhere else because I am there.

It would never cross their mind to go back inside and experience the warm fire – they would rather shiver and be with me.

The experience they desire is to be with me – no matter what personal hardship they have to endure.

I'll bet you anything that many of you – all of you at some time – have said unless I experience what I want I'm leaving – I'm not giving – my eyes are going to show my unhappiness.

Along comes my old abused dog – looking for love – looking for acceptance and he sees your eyes – he runs away and never comes back.

How do I know all this stuff about you? It very scary – I know all this stuff about because I know my-self.

You know the most precious times with my dogs is when they are most uncomfortable. When by their own choice would rather be with me shivering than lying by the fire with out me. It's about experiencing love at first sight.

Some of the Long Riders wear a patch on their vests which simply says: "these are my church clothes"- they are so used to being judged about their clothes: "why can't you wear church clothes to church? – these are my church clothes"

Around here Church people say to me; "haven't you got anything else but black" – up north they say "thanks for wearing black".

Let me tell you about the saddest day of my life in the church. I was a vicar here in Murray Bridge. We had a bible study for people on the edge. Pastor Peter Ziersch had a way with outsiders and he had a little group who met weekly.

One of the women who came – let's call her Katrina – was what church people would call "a bit rough" – she wore the briefest clothing – everything hanging out where it shouldn't – sometimes you just didn't know where to look.

She came from a good Lutheran Mallee family – but she was estranged – basically kicked out of home because she didn't conform to "the way" – off the rails.

Anyway Katrina grew and grew in faith – never went to church – only to the bible study.

She began to realise she wanted to go to church – she wanted Holy Communion – her last time was at her confirmation.

We decided to reaffirm her baptism – a little ceremony and welcome her into church membership.

Wonderful. She spoke to her parents for the first time and invited them to come – and they agreed.

Their big day arrived – I was very excited – and then along comes Katrina. What was she wearing?

A see-through singlet – no! If only!

She bought a new dress – it was a mustard coloured "A skirt" – and a beigey coloured polo neck top – her hair was flattened down – she looked absolutely awful.

We had got so used to the feisty, free Katrina – and here she was fully compliant – avoiding the judgments she had experienced so many times by wearing exactly what all the other ladies were wearing.

She felt she had to pass her parents Judgment, she felt she had to pass your judgment. Her previous experience of church – the body of Christ – you and me - was judgment – and she didn't want be judged on her special day – so the mustard dress and the flat hair.

I still keep in touch with Katrina she belongs to a new church now – it's the same church as most of our kids belong to – it's the private faith at home connecting to God in their own way church – it's a church without people who demand with their eyes what they should wear, or do, or sing, or act in ways which a 100% foreign to them.

Paul started churches, the foundation was people's experience to Jesus words of love and forgiveness.

Listen again: *"Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new."*

Can we take home today, "I am the body of Christ", "I am his love into the Murray Valley Community", "I want people to love me at first sight"

Can we remember what Paul's says of us: we are Jesus' ambassadors – we are ministers of reconciliation – agents of Jesus love. Like I said last week – God did not make love and compassion a choice it's a command. By making it a command we of course have to obey it – but because it's his command he empowers us to obey it.

Love and compassion are no longer our duty – Love and compassion our nature – it's what people experience from us.

When people look into your eyes is it love at first sight? When we get this, worship will never be the same again.

We'll be like my Whippets. Shivering, uncomfortable, Singing the most dreadful songs, or the most boring theologically correct hymns, drinking the cheapest coffee, following a disordered service and loving it because we are with him.

"Anyone who belongs to this church is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new."

Lord let people see your love in our eyes. Help us be your ambassadors in all that we say and Amen.