

Promises, Promises (#5)

- "Do you promise, depending on the grace of God, to profess publicly your loyalty to Jesus Christ...?"

Recap

- Over past few weeks we've been looking at the promises we take joining church:
 - akin to **wedding vows**, which we grow into full appreciation of over time
 - **they set a direction...** but we have to discover the full implications of those promises as we live them out over the years that follow!
- There was the **promise to worship**:
 - lifeblood of relationship with **Jesus!**
- There was the **promise to read Bible and pray**:
 - keep in touch with **Jesus!**
- There was the **promise to give fitting proportion of time, talents and money**:
 - as a response to all that **Jesus** has done for us!
- Begin to see a common theme?
 - **all comes back to our relationship with Jesus;**
 - as Saviour, as Lord, as friend, as brother...
- Its exactly the same with this morning's promise, "**to profess publicly your loyalty to Jesus Christ**".

"Profess Publicly"

- Who are you? How would you describe yourself?
 - **work** - **minister; computer scientist;**
 - **family** - **Helen's husband, Peter, Andrew, Mark's dad, Agnes' sister, Robin and Retta's son;**
 - **location** - **living in Dundee, home town of Edinburgh, brought up across the Central Belt!**
 - **interests** - **computing, cycling...**
- These are the things that generally define the parameters of life and identity
 - **our question this morning is: are we known as Christ's?**
- In the pasage from Acts we read earlier, the disciples were **known for who they followed**.
 - it showed up: in deed and in word (**v.6**)
 - they were prepared to name their master even when it would cause difficulties! (**v.1b**)
 - despite persecution (**v.3**) they didn't disown Jesus;
 - also, on arrival, named themselves as Christ's! (**v.4**)
 - **they invited folk to watch them, to look at them - to see them as more than merely decent, upright citizens... but rather to identify them as radical and challenging**
- Are we like that?
- Or, **when do we shy away from naming our Lord?**
 - do we neglect the poor and issues of justice? (for example, are our **shopping habits** different from those around us? Are we as ready to have more than we need, or not check on how a product was produced, as the next person?) - **and tell folk why?**
 - do we neglect Christian morality? (for example, **keeping our head down** in discussions about **asylum seekers** - what does the Bible say? - **homosexuality** - **marriage breakdown and relationships outside of marriage** - or any of the other areas where we as Christians are out of step with the world around us)
- The promise we took - and the call Jesus has left us with - is to **profess publicly**
 - so lets allow our faith out in public!

- though sensitivity and tact are called for, though we may be embarrassed, and not want to make others feel uncomfortable...
- lets live without apology!

"Loyalty to Jesus Christ"

- Did you notice....?
 - the focus in the passage was on Jesus Christ - Philip proclaimed the Christ
 - he didn't speak merely of the church ("come to church"), or of morality ("live a good life"), or of justice ("treat other people properly"), or (in our day) Make Poverty History or Fair Trade, or any of the other things the world is prepared to listen to Christians opinion on
- Christ was at the heart of what Philip and the other Christians spoke of then.... and must be at the heart:
 - not just loyalty to church!
 - not just loyalty to a counter-cultural cause!
- But loyalty to the offense of a crucified Christ, who demands exclusive loyalty:
 - *"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)*
- Christianity is not a club we join:
 - rather, we are in a war that captures our whole identity
 - soldier in the army of God; member of the family of God!
- "Who are you? What do you do?"...:
 - what is our answer? even if the words we choose to express it may not be so stark, do we answer:
- "I'm a Christian! I serve Jesus!"
- How: worked through in Lost for Words course we did a bit more than a year ago, and will hopefully do again in the Autumn.
 - how we can direct people to Jesus, pray for them, answer questions

"Depending on the Grace of God"

- How do you feel about the task now?
 - it's impossible!? - understandable!
- Just occasionally with the boys I've said something and not expressed what I've meant very clearly:
 - what they've thought is that I was asking them to do something that is beyond them
 - fix something electrical, or move a big box, or something!!
 - generally there is a fleeting panic.... because the task is impossible for the boys to do on their own... until we sort out that that wasn't what I was asking them to do!

God doesn't leave us high and dry!

- we see that here in the passage: Philip wasn't acting alone!
- his proclamation was accompanied by miraculous signs
- We can have confidence, that despite appearances, God changes people
- Julia Higgins, Durham CU, Mission, finished a week ago:
 - she's been keeping us in touch with what has been happening so we could pray...
 - we got an e-mail from Julia last Sunday afternoon:

- "One particular guy and his girlfriend had been coming to the events all this week and on Friday night the guy gave his life to Jesus and then was desperate to help in anyway he could and so went and got his car and carted all the PA equipment for us(!). His biggest burden was how to tell his girlfriend that he had become a Christian, so at the end of the night, during which he hadn't seen her as she'd come along with other friends to the event, he called her and asked if he could come round to talk. When he arrived at her house, she said 'There's something you need to know... I've decided tonight to follow Jesus!' Both of them on the same night, but seperately from each other had become Christians and both of them knew their relationship had to change because of it, yet neither knew about the other until he came to see her - isn't God amazingly gracious!"

- Julia and the CU in Durham couldn't "arrange" something like that!
 - only God - and He does!
 - however weak and frail we may feel, he is ready and willing to use us to see people come to know Jesus
 - all he asks is that we, "depending on the grace of God, [to] profess publicly [y] our loyalty to Jesus Christ"!
- May God indeed grant us his grace to do just that!