

Talking tongues



Richard Greatrex *reflects on* Isaiah 50:4-9a, James 3:1-12 and Mark 8:27-38

Dominating this week's readings is the invitation to hear God's voice over our own cacophonies. Both Isaiah and James focus on the tongue as the organ of speech. For Isaiah it is a tool for encouragement, especially when coupled with a listening ear. James is more wary: tongues may be small, but misguided or malicious speech causes great damage. Today we might compare tongues to fingers swiping an injudicious comment into the maelstrom of social media.

Jesus, in Mark's Gospel, finds his disciples better at speaking than listening, with Peter proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah one minute then the next rebuking him for not adhering to the traditional messianic template. Throughout

Mark the disciples struggle to hear the truth of Jesus' words; they still view the Messiah as an all-conquering hero. Jesus regularly informs them that the necessary route for God's Son is death and resurrection, yet they continue to block out his message.

Isaiah listens carefully and catches the truth – faithfully following God isn't always going to be popular; there's a high probability it will lead to suffering. Jesus, referencing his sacrifice in language that the disciples will only comprehend after his resurrection, proclaims the same: taking up our crosses without shame may bring pain, but such action will give us the tongue of a teacher, leading by example and declaring through our deeds God's hope of life lived well. 🌸

Holy God, break through our daily distractions, that we might hear your voice in our hearts, the world and each other and, encouraged by your word, may we be transformed into compassionate builders of your kingdom. Amen.

St Paul Part IV

by Becky Mynett

Becky concludes her series about the life and work of St Paul.

What can we learn about Paul's theology from his letters?

Firstly, his understanding of God and Jesus was based on his experience of meeting the risen Christ. Having been a persecutor of the Church, he became convinced that Jesus was sent by God. As a Pharisee, he already

believed that when God rescued Israel from bondage the dead would be resurrected. He saw Jesus' resurrection as proof that he was from God. In 1 Corinthians he explains that everyone would have a new spiritual body. In his earlier letters, especially 1 Thessalonians, he clearly assumes that this will happen in his lifetime.

Secondly, we learn that there was a controversy about how Gentiles should follow Jesus. Did they need to become Jewish, be circumcised and obey the Law? In Galatians, Paul is clear that this is not necessary. It is faith in Jesus (rather than the Law) which puts one right with God. 🌸

“Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'”

1 Corinthians 15:33

Baptism Part I – history and sacrament

by Heather Smith

Christians have been baptised since the very beginning of the Christian faith, and ceremonial washing with water is mentioned in Jewish tradition long before Christ. In Exodus (29:4), as part of the ordination of priests, Aaron and his sons were brought to the entrance of the Tent of the Meeting (tabernacle) and washed with water. In the New Testament, the story of baptism

begins with John the Baptist's ministry, including the baptism of Christ himself.

After the resurrection, Christ commissions his disciples to baptise them with the Trinitarian formula: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), while in John's Gospel the disciples baptise during Christ's ministry on earth (John 4:2).

Once we reach the Acts of the Apostles, the familiar pattern is established, of coming to Christ followed by baptism. Paul was baptised (Acts 9:18) as was the Ethiopian eunuch (8:38). Baptism soon settled into a set liturgy, and today *Common Worship* provides forms of baptism, both within and outside a Eucharist. 🌸