**Sermon for 2nd June 2019 (Seventh Sunday of Easter)**

**Is. 44. 1-8; Ps. 68. 1-13, 18-19; Eph. 4. 7-16**

*May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

***“Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”***

In the opening verses of chapter 4 of his letter to the Ephesians Paul starts to encourage his hearers to walk in a manner worthy of their calling; to lead a life ***“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*** This is a timely reminder to us, as we witness the behaviour of some of our elected representatives in the self-seeking and consequent wranglings over current political issues. Where is that longing and determination to seek what is best so as to keep together our United Kingdom as a whole, and not what suits the individual interests of those wanting power? So also in the church, the assembly of all God’s people, the body of Christ, it is up to each of us as members of that body to seek the growth of that body in love. As Paul again reminds us, ***“There is one body and one Spirit, …….one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”*** Yes, of course there are differences of opinion, of practice, even of beliefs, but we all subscribe to the same Creed, the same basic belief in our Lord Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God, made Man, lived among us, died for the sins of every one of God’s created human beings, buried, and raised to resurrection life on the third day. And because of all this, we know that he **will** come again in glory and that at some stage we shall be made like unto him in resurrection life. But in order to achieve this happy state, as Paul also writes to advise us, ***“we must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.”*** His answer is the text I have chosen for this evening; ***“Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”***

I want to concentrate for a moment on the opening three words, ***“speaking the truth”.*** In the english translations those same three words are used in verse 25 of this chapter, where Paul is actually quoting from the Book of Zechariah; there both the Greek and Hebrew original use both verb and noun “speak” and “truth”. But here in verse 15 it uses a verb only, which means rather “being truthful” - or as an alternative translation in the King James Version puts it “being sincere”. The point I am making is that it is not just in speech that we must be truthful but in **all** our actions and being. As Paul writes in verse 21, ***“truth is in Jesus”*** - that is, not just in his speech or his actions but in his very being. And we must grow to be in every way as like Jesus as we possibly can, with God’s help.

While on the subject of translation, I wish to draw attention to another small point. In verse 8 of tonight’s reading from Ephesians Paul quotes from part of the Psalm 68 (verse 18), which we have already sung, in the words ***“he gave gifts to his people”.*** However, we sang : ***“Thou (the Lord) …. received gifts for men”*** both in the metrical psalm and also in the introit that the choir has sung tonight. Consider also that the New Revised Standard Version reads ***“receiving gifts from people”.*** Which of these three versions works best? I think I would put my money on Paul, who would probably have known the original in both Greek and Hebrew. Certain it is that we as the body of Christ, the church, have been given abundant gifts. Among those many and varied gifts are, as Paul lists here, that some people would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers; the purposes behind these particular gifts were, at that time in the very early years of the new Christian faith, to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ. But of course each one of us today has our own gift or talent from God - giving a smile of welcome to a stranger, making the coffee, arranging the flowers, reading the scriptures in church, preparing the intercessions, musicianship, and many others - all of these too equally help to build up the body of Christ. The ultimate aim is that every member of that body with our individual gifts should come to full maturity in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. Thus shall we ***“grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”*** This will enable us to be truthful and sincere in love, and thus to embrace fully the two commandments by which Jesus summarised the law and the prophets: ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength”*** - and - “***you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”***

As Paul himself might have written if he had been born, not in Tarsus, but in Liverpool: All you need is love - and - you’ll never walk alone.

***Amen.***