

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006

Freed to be me – knowing God's love and freedom

Colossians 3:1-17

Psalm 23



## Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

At the beginning of this New Year we are using the picture of the three valleys that have traditionally been seen to encircle and dissect the city of Jerusalem as a metaphor for the 'valleys' that we can journey through to embrace a place of wholeness and healing. Beginning from an understanding that our roots are in knowing our Father's love for us we have journeyed through the Kidron valley on the Eastern side of Jerusalem – a valley of sorrow and grief; and yet a valley where God is present and where Christ himself walked 2000 years ago. This week we journey through the valley of Hinnon on the West side of Jerusalem, a valley that symbolizes sin at its worst, the site of pagan practices and sins of people against God and one another.

This past week has seen cases of violence, rape and murder featuring heavily in the press; such newspaper headlines can often lead us to question how people can be so cruel and evil. Looking back to the Old Testament to King David we see a prime example of someone who had everything, spiraling into a black hole of sin and degradation, beginning with lust and the desire for someone else's wife and ending in betrayal and murder. And yet later in life David could still utter the words 'though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death you are with me, your rod and staff comfort me.' He could do this simply because he knew the power of God's forgiveness. When confronted with his sin by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 12) David confessed 'I have sinned against the Lord' and with those words of confession followed absolution from Nathan -as David confessed so he was forgiven.

Not many of us have spiraled into such dramatic sin as David did but if we are honest all of us journey through the valley of Hinnon where the presence of sin is great, and all of us know something of the power of sin and the hold it can have on our lives. In his letter to the Colossians Paul helpfully identifies some of these sins: Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language. Again if we are honest many of us may have fallen into patterns and habits of sin which have enslaved us and from which there seems no escape. Some of us may feel trapped in the valley of Hinnon and yet, as in Jerusalem itself, the valley of Hinnon is not far from the Temple where the songs of God are sung and can be heard Songs of forgiveness and restoration.

The parable of the Prodigal Son reminds us of the Father's unconditional love for us. The Father did not love his son any less when he turned his back on him and went his own way, and he did not love his son any less when his son chose to live in sin and degradation. As with David when he committed adultery and murder God still loved him. God's love reaches into the darkest valley and beckons us to the cross, to a path of righteousness and to still waters. There is always hope of restoration with the God who sent his Son to live and die for us, the God who sent his son that we might know the power of forgiveness, the God who heals hearts that are crushed and broken by sin, and, as in the Prodigal Son, all God asks is for us to come to our senses, to set out to go back to our Father and say "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you"

## Witness: Questions to discuss



Why do you think we so often sin and turn away from God's ways?

How can God still love us when we do wrong?

Have you ever felt trapped by your own sinfulness?

How do you approach the prayers of penitence, confession and absolution used in our services?

How has God's forgiveness changed you?