Colossians 1: 1-14. Be ready for the bees!

Paul emphasises that he is writing with authority of Christ – an apostle. Timothy only a brother. But that does not mean that Timothy never speaks or acts with things of value – but needs to be more humble perhaps in presentation.

Reminds the readers in Colossae that they are holy, set apart for God. Grace – what definition do we rely upon? Paul used it to convey blessedness enjoyed by one who is favoured by a superior. Bestowed by God, freely, separate from whether someone deserves it.

Also peace, or shalom, encapsulating healthy condition of life experienced by someone who enjoys God’s favour – an inner harmony. This is a prayerful greeting, enriched with these deep blessings of grace and peace from Christ Himself. Colossae was a small town, insignificant in contrast to surrounding towns. The church being addressed was a minority, surrounded by paganism and idolatry. This type of peace/shalom is contrary to the experience of spiritual conflict that would have been faced every day.

Paul states that he gives thanks whenever praying for that small church, for their faith. For the fact that those people drew their inspiration and hope from being in relationship with Christ. That they exercised that faith by showing love to all – welcoming all, just as Christ welcomes everyone, no matter what class or intellect. An all-embracing love and acceptance. No cliques there!

So far my friends, this is what I see in this congregation. I believe that we are similar to those being addressed in Colossae. When I speak of you, this church, to people, my face lights up and I smile when I bring to mind each of your names. We all speak with each other – no cliques here either.

This faith and love is motivated from hope – a true hope in Jesus. A life lived in the knowledge of an eternal destiny. The hope Paul is speaking is given by God, and nourished by the promises of God – the coming of the Saviour, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. This hope is not dependant on optimism or circumstances, but on the unchanging character of God. This hope comes from studying the word of God, the bible.

And the words in the bible, through the revelation of Christ through the Holy Spirit, becomes a living word for each of us. Christ is for everyone – individually – but also for everyone – universally. If we become too focussed on one or the other, then we have the potential to lose the full meaning of God’s salvation, love and mission in this world.

I believe that we as a fellowship do keep our eyes on our own growth, for the purpose of allowing God to grow His kingdom. Paul promotes understanding and wisdom that is given through the Spirit.

It is the wisdom and understanding, that growing knowledge of Christ, that will make us each stronger and be able to bear fruit.

Whenever I hear about Spiritual fruitfulness, I like to picture a tree, groaning with the weight of the crop. I mean, this is fruit given by God, so it will be weighty and plentiful, from a generous giver. But let us give a little thought to the life of a fruit tree.

Actually – I don’t have fruit trees in my garden, so I will use my wisteria as an example. I bought this small wisteria in around 1990 and planted it in my garden. Each year there were new leaves and shoots, it became larger each year – but no flower. I was patient, I had read that it can take up to around five years before a wisteria flowers.

Well, after about six years, a small bud appeared. You have no idea how excited I was! I checked on it every morning and afternoon, watching it lengthen and the promise of small purple flowers unveiling themselves.

Until one afternoon I went to check, and no matter how much I looked, I could not see that bud. I went into the house and declared this distressing news to my Mum – who informed me that when she had been playing cricket with my young son in the garden, he had managed to hit the ball straight into my wisteria – straight into the branch with the bud, and it dropped to the ground.

It seems ridiculous, but I was mortified. All my patient waiting, and that promise was then crushed in seconds. Do we sometimes feel like that with our Spiritual life? We put so much effort into our growth, we begin to see the results form, and then crash – the expectation falls to the ground.

So, back to my wisteria, I had to wait until the next year to see another bud, which this time progressed unhindered. The next few years saw much growth and many flowers.

And then, we had some building work done in the early 2000s. So much disruption, so many materials that were being delivered, with lorries up and down the drive – and also over the root of my wisteria. Again, mortified.

However, the tree may have been impeded – but it was not stopped. The roots had spread so deep and with so many shoots that the tree survived and flourished – and continues today.

I think that is the same with our Spiritual fruitfulness, hence why Paul proceeds with the words of being strengthened, endurance and patience.

Every tree will bear fruit, and it will be good fruit if grown through relationship with the Holy Spirit. But sometimes the roots need to be deepened, so that the shoots can form in new places and the whole tree can flourish.

In time my wisteria became home to nesting birds, a hidden place for a deer to rest, and at one point the noise of the bees when standing under the canopy was wonderful.

If the wisteria had waited until the bees arrived before producing flowers, it would have been too late – they would have flown away and found somewhere else. The flowers needed to be in place ready for when the bees arrived.

How do we see our individual trees? How do we see our united trees? Paul was writing to a church in Colossae that could be similar to our church today. A small minority in a town that, compared to nearby places, could seem insignificant.

I want to give you the same encouragement that Paul gave to them. Hold on to that hope, that assurance that has been given, that Christ will come again, that we will be resurrected to eternal life with Him.

If we allow that truth to fill our whole being, and allow our life to reflect that good news, that does not depend on circumstances, then every deed and action that we take will be from the inspiration of our heavenly Father, and therefore good fruit will be produced. The right fruit for the right season. And whilst we keep our Spiritual fruit (flowers) – Jesus will bring the bees, in His time!