



Colossians 1:21–22

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation –

Reflection

In the early hours of the morning of the

15th of April 1912 the White Star Liner Titanic, the largest ship afloat in her day, and carrying some of the wealthiest people in the world, raised her stern high above the frigid waters of the North Atlantic and began a slow descent to the bottom of the ocean. That famous night saw the extremes of human behaviour – from shameful cowardice, to the terrible beauties of sacrificial love. But with the Titanic gone and her lifeboats spread upon the icy waters among the crying, drowning swimmers, the story was almost totally devoted to self-serving cowardice, for of the 1,600 people who were not able to get into the lifeboats, only thirteen were picked up by the eighteen half-empty boats that hovered nearby.

In Boat Number 5, when Third Officer Pit-

man heard the anguished cries, he turned the boat around and shouted, 'Now, men, we will pull toward the wreck!' But the passengers protested, 'Why should we lose all our lives in a useless attempt to save others from the ship?' Pitman gave in. And for the next hour Number 5, with forty people on board and a capacity of sixty-five, floated gently on the calm Atlantic, while the forty listened to the fading cries of swimmers barely 100 metres away. The story was much the same in the other boats. In Number 2, Fourth Officer Boxhall asked the ladies, 'Shall we go back?' They said no, so Boat Number 2, about 60 percent full, likewise drifted while her people callously listened to the desperate pleas in the darkness. On Boat Number 6, the situation was reversed as the women begged Quartermaster Hitchens to return, but he

refused, painting a vivid picture of them all drowning in an overturning lifeboat filled passed capacity. The women pleaded all the more as the cries grew fewer but he would not budge. Of the eighteen boats, only one boat, Number 14, returned to help – and this was an hour after the Titanic's sinking, when the thrashing crowd had 'thinned out'.

Not humanity's finest hour. But somehow evocative of our desperate plight. It's like a parable of life; our world gone wrong. One moment so secure, wealthy, on top of the world; but unbeknownst to us on a collision course with sin's effects. And then suddenly – whether it be an accident, a redundancy, cancer, divorce or even simply the stark realities of old age – our dreams are dashed on the rocks and we are fight-

ing for our lives, fallen humanity adrift in an unfriendly sea, alienated, every person for themselves, unable and unwilling to help one another despite furtive individual attempts, our true collective colours coming out. The mirage evaporates and we're surrounded by a world gone wrong. And the wrongness of everything points to the fundamental problem of people's estrangement from God, from each other and from God's plans for creation, because of sin.

This is how the Colossians were, Paul reminds them in today's passage. After praying for them and raising their vision of Jesus Christ to the highest heights, in today's passage Paul reminds the Colossians of the impact that Christ has had on their lives in a brief 'before and after' or, in

Paul's language, a 'once you were ... but now'.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation –

Paul reminds the Colossians that once they too were flailing around in the ocean, without God or hope in the world. But it is not as if they were reaching out their hand to him to be saved by him; more like shaking their fist at him as they drowned. Verse 21 again,

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.

Alienated from God. Enemies with him in your minds. Evil behaviour. 'This is how you once were', says Paul. Not oblivious to the good news of Jesus Christ quietly going about your affairs in the world but active enemies of God, alienated and estranged from his presence by not only your evil behaviour but your conscious hostility towards him. It is a dark picture, much like the glimpse into the human heart that we received as those in half empty life boats listened callously to the dying cries in the darkness of fellow human beings mere metres away. We don't like to think of ourselves in this way but occasionally scripture takes us into the dark recesses of the

human heart and when it does so there is nowhere for any of us to hide. Like in Romans 1 for example, which tars all mankind with a common brush,

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles...28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought

not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.

Rom 1:21–23

This is a dim picture of humanity, but it is not just the 'before' picture for the Colos-

sians, this is the universal state of every human heart before we receive Christ.

‘But now’ verse 22 continues, now that you have encountered the risen Lord Jesus and received him into your heart by faith, verse 22, God

has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation –

Jesus Christ gave up his place on the boat for us, and just like Jonah who dove into the seas to calm the oceans, only three days later to be raised again from his watery grave and go on to save the town of Ninevah, so too Jesus Christ heard our drowning cries and despite our shaking

our fists at God he sacrificed his own life in place of ours to effect cosmic reconciliation between God and the whole sin-tainted created order. In defeating Satan, sin and death Jesus has not only reached down and plucked us out of the ocean but, if you like, he's rebuilt the Titanic and placed us back upon her indestructible for all eternity (and the community we're now a part of is far happier aboard).

Think & Pray

But by way of reflection today I'd like you to meditate over the last few words of our passage. Because of Jesus Christ we are now 'presented holy in God's sight' 'without blemish and free from accusation'. I'm not sure there is a more liberating thought in all of Scripture. In today's artwork our

sins have been nailed to the cross. They are counted against us no more. Because of Jesus we are unconditionally forgiven and eternally without blemish and free from accusation. Cherish this thought and feeling today. Forgive yourself. See yourself as God now sees you. And live accordingly.

From alienated, enemies in our minds and evil behaviour; to holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – only because of Jesus Christ. As the truth of this statement washes over you by the power of the Holy Spirit, what is it today you would like to say to God in prayer?