

This is a good text for Spring. Talking of Spring, somebody once asked a person to watch and see whether his car blinkers were working. The person looked and said: Yes...No...Yes...No... Spring is rather like that this year. And so is our Christian life. Is our Christian life operating? Yes...No...Our Christian life might need a good Spring Clean... a really thorough Spring Clean. Our church might need the same. Our church might need a really good Spring Clean. That's what happened in Paul's life... that's what happened in Martin Luther's life... that's what happened in the life of the Church at the time of the Reformation. And if it happened for them and their church, it surely needs to happen to us and our church. In fact the Reformers said that the Church needs to in a constant state of Reformation... in a constant state of Spring Cleaning.

Paul put it this way: **I consider everything I formerly valued as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.** Paul tells us what some of those things were: His circumcision... his Jewish ancestry... belonging to the Pharisees... so zealous he persecuted the church... faultless obedience to the Jewish law... Luther put it this way: I count as rubbish my Saxon ancestry... my belonging to the Augustinian monks... my zealous attempts at keeping God's laws and the laws of my order of monks... my constant confession of my sins. When Paul and Luther met Christ and heard the good news of how God loved and accepted them because of what Christ did for them, the things they had formerly valued and trusted in became worthless rubbish, and needed to be discarded.

What in your life needs to be discarded? What rubbish are you hanging on to, and valuing? What is getting in the way of you trusting in and following Jesus? Heb. 12 says: **let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily slows our progress.** So what is it with you? Could it be the time you spend working and working out how to make a fortune? Could it be the time you spend playing or watching sport? Could it be the time you spend at church meetings? Could it be how zealous you are in trying to be good, or trying to do good works? What in your life needs to be discarded?...

What in your church on in the LCA needs to be discarded? Is it our obsession with meetings, or with constitutions, or even with Synods and their 438 pages of reports? Is it our struggles over liturgies and songs and instruments? Is it our battles over who can preach the Gospel? Is it our fears of speaking in tongues, or of raising our hands in worship? When Paul and Luther look at us what do they think? Wouldn't they be calling us to discard a lot of rubbish? Wouldn't they be calling us to do a proper Spring Clean? Wouldn't Luther be reminding us that the church is always reforming, always changing, always moving from the old to the new, from the old Covenant to the New Covenant, from the law to the Gospel, from sin to grace. Wouldn't Paul be reminding us that there's a heap of things that need to be **put off, eg. The old self, impurity, desire for more and more, sinful anger, selfishness, abusive language, discouraging or slanderous words, anything that blocks the work of the HS – put it off**, says Paul in Eph 4 & Col.3. Above all thinking we can be saved by keeping God's law!

Joy and I have just returned from Greece and Turkey. The last place we visited was Philippi. After Paul met Jesus on the Damascus Road, and discovered Christ, and found that Jesus was all he needed, he discarded everything else, and took off to tell everybody the Good News of Jesus. He told them God loves all people, and Jesus died on the cross for all their sins, and forgives them, and sets them free from law living, to living in the freedom of the Gospel. He told them that righteousness is a free gift from God, received by faith, and the gate to eternal life is open through faith in Jesus Christ. One day Paul was struggling in his mission work in Turkey, then called Asia Minor. Then he had a vision in which a man from Macedonia, now called Greece in Europe, called: **come over and help us**. Paul immediately moved from Troas to Philippi, from Asia to Europe, met some women at a river, told them the Good News of Jesus, and one at least, and her family believed, & were baptised. (slides).

This is a story of the amazing changes the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings, and what is discarded to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

1. God calls Paul to cross from Asia to Europe with the Gospel for the first time....
2. Paul preaches to and teaches a group made up entirely of women...
3. The first Christian in Europe is a woman, Lydia.... slave girl... Roman Jailer...
4. Into the water from one side, and out the other – **put off...put on...** old – new.
5. Lydia became leader of the Philippian church, and greatly honoured... today...

Read Acts 16 to see how the church in Europe begins with a bang. Paul preaches Christ. The HS opens hearts, grants faith in Christ, drives out evil spirits, sets prisoners free, baptizes people, gathers people together to form a learning, worshiping house church most likely led by Lydia, there is wonderful hospitality and great joy that people have believed in Christ and been baptised.

And here you are in Murray Bridge and Monarto. Most of you have been Christians for years. How are you doing? Yes... No... It's a long time since you've walked through the waters of Baptism. Which side of the water are you on? ...: the entry or the exit side? Are you still consumed by the rubbish of the old life, or have you discarded the old life to fully grasp the new life in Christ?... Today is another day to put off the old and put on the new...

Jesus says: **The kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it... in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field.** When Jesus found Paul he discovered the greatest treasure you can find. He happily let go all he had & trusted in Jesus only. He discovered that in Jesus he had everything. He discovered that JESUS + NOTHING = EVERYTHING. In Jesus he received love that had no conditions attached. In Jesus he received a righteousness that was pure gift. In Jesus he discovered a door that was open to the free gift of eternal life. Luther found the same; so did Lydia; so did the Jailer. Jesus has done everything. Jesus means everything. *I want Jesus more than gold or silver, only he can satisfy, I love him more than any other, so much more than anything.* **I consider everything worth losing in order to gain Christ.** Amen.