



## Pastor's Page

### *Home Truths*

As I quickly started to get ready for the evening event I had this nagging feeling that there was going to be a meal laid on for us. Not being sure whether this was the case I decided to eat anyway just to be on the safe side! (Yes God has challenged me about gluttony!) Well on arrival I went to reception signed my name and soon discovered that the whole evening revolved around a meal! I rose to the challenge!

Sitting down at my table I introduced myself to the other three gentlemen already seated. Firstly there was Philip, a very gently spoken man with a lovely Scottish lilt who talked about playing the violin and organ. He also told me that he used to sing in the church choir. He asked me what the difference was between the Church of Scotland and the Baptist church. I gave a long answer in the hope that by the time I'd finished he would have forgotten what his question was! Then there was Graham who explained that he had studied theology at Birmingham Bible College but had found some of the liberal theological views expressed difficult to handle. He then talked at length about the Reformation and Luther's reason for nailing his famous 95 theses to the door of the Castle church at Wittenburg on 31 October 1517. I nodded at appropriate moments and hummed in reverential tones! Then there was Alex, the quietest of the three who seemed happy just to listen to the others which he did intently. At one point in the conversation he asked me if Christening was the same as Baptism. I tried to answer with wisdom and diplomacy as well as conveying some insightful knowledge of the subject by saying – "Yes!" It may have been brief but I think it hit the nail on the head. Alex seemed happy with the answer.

The longer I chatted with these guys the more I liked them. And the more I liked them the more upsetting I found it when I considered their personal circumstances. You see Philip, Graham and Alex are homeless men. And in fact everyone in the room that night apart from the Birmingham City Mission workers (about 25 people) were homeless. I'm sure the Lord arranged it so that I would sit with guys who had had similar experiences to me (church life, music, theology etc..) in order to help me see that homeless people are people like me, but with nowhere permanently to lay their head at night and no place they can call home. And what an awful thing that is – but what a privilege for me that evening to speak of God's love for each one of them. As I stood up to address the diners, I honestly didn't know what reception I would get. It was one thing to chat with Philip, Graham and Alex over steak and kidney pie but another thing to present the gospel to the entire room. It had been noisy all evening with some guests even heckling during grace. So I was ready to give a really brief talk if needs be! Resisting the strong temptation to begin with a joke, I started by reading 12 verses from Romans chapter 8. They listened in almost complete silence. I told them about "the God who is for us" and how nothing in all creation can separate us from His love. I spoke of Jesus' death upon the cross for our sin, and how if we trust him there is no condemnation for us. They still listened in silence apart from one man who began to angrily throw questions at me before walking out mumbling under his breath. The rest continued to listen, and afterwards Philip quietly said to me "that was powerful, thanks" And he was right, the gospel message is powerful.

And thanks to the ministry of Birmingham City Mission people like Philip, Graham and Alex are not only hearing about God's love, they are seeing it in action too.

*19<sup>th</sup> August 2007*