

6th Sunday Trinity

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

9th July 2023

May I speak in the name of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I wonder if you're familiar with the following feeling?

You write an email, taking time to clearly and carefully articulate your message in the hopes that the recipient will respond either with information you need or to confirm that something can progress forward. You spell check it and glance through it one last time, making sure that the attachments actually are attached, before hitting send and happily heading off to have a cup of tea.

Yet when you return to your computer you're greeted by a response which is both baffling and infuriating. Somehow despite a clearly written email the recipient has managed to get completely the wrong end of the stick and is raising objections left right and centre. Dealing with this is going to take more carefully worded emails, or perhaps not-so-carefully as they should be emails, to

try and sort out. Perhaps a phone call or dropping round for a quiet chat would have been more helpful after all.

This is true to an extent with all kinds of written communication, whether it be emails, text messages or posts on social media - indeed, with social media the more miscommunications there are between people the more "engagement" there is and the greater the "audience retention rate" and thus the more opportunities to present the advertisements which are a major revenue stream for the various companies.

There's a lot of elements which influence this kind of experience. Timing, the context you're in when you read a message, as well as your own biases and preconceived ideas and expectations. There's also all those elements which are absent: there's no mannerisms, no eye contact, and no real sense of a person's tone of voice.

(For instance, if you're reading this sermon rather than listening to it 'live', you're likely hearing your own thinking voice rather than my voice within your head - which gives - or may give - everything I say a somewhat different complexion).

All these things affect how we read emails, as indeed they affect how we read Paul's letters. In Church we also have

an extra factor which comes into play; we hear someone reading a small portion of the letter, and depending on how much coffee they may or may not have had that morning they may read it more or less clearly, they may read it with inflections on particular phrases or they may read the whole thing more neutrally.

In an ideal world we would listen to the whole letter being read out in one go by someone who was able to replicate the same tone of voice and delivery as Paul had in mind when he dictated it - though I suppose it's possible that in particularly strident and passionate moments that might be a double edged sword!

Yet it's clear that Paul was aware of the limitation of writing letters. Indeed he makes it clear at the start that he's only writing because his eagerness to proclaim the Gospel to those in Rome is greater than the limitations which prevent him from physically travelling to be there; even though that is his heart's desire:

For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the Gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I

am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented) in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have the rest of the Gentiles... hence my eagerness to proclaim the Gospel to you also who are in Rome. (Romans 1:9-15)

Paul draws his conclusion to the letter making it clear yet again that whilst he knows the Romans to be faithful; *Nevertheless on some points I have written boldly by way of reminder* (R 15:15) because although he wants to visit on the way to Spain, he is currently caught up in events in Macedonia and Achaia and has to go now to Jerusalem instead.

Holding in mind that Paul is writing out of a strong sense of wanting to be an encouragement and a blessing, as well as in certain places to offer a necessary correction, to the Roman Christians, I think that when we read Romans Chapter 8 we have to do so mindful that in many ways it is the climax of the letter and as well as being a

carefully thought out articulation of the heart of the Gospel is also a passionate invitation to us to not just hear the Gospel but to gain an understanding of the Gospel.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (R8:1-4) (NKJV)

This is the meat of faith which we are encouraged to eat and enjoy over the milk of the Gospel; for the Gospel can be put very simply - Jesus Christ is God himself who has died for our sins on the Cross so that by his resurrection we might be assured of God's forgiveness and receive the hope of eternal life.

This is wonderful as it is, yet like children we should follow our curiosity and keep on asking questions: Why does he have to die for our sins? How does his death take

away our sins? How do we who want to do good resist the power of sin in our lives?

We have heard last week that by the sin of Adam and Eve all of creation was knocked spiritually off kilter, such that sin affects every area of our lives and no matter how we try we need God's help to achieve anything truly good, for otherwise the Good which we do is limited by our exposure as sinful people. Sin is made known in our lives by breaking the Law, the holy commandments of God. Although the law is good and holy, by itself it is not enough to make us holy. As Paul says here: For what the law could not do in the weakness of flesh, God did by sending his own son in he likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh.

It was reflecting on this very point which led Gregory of Naziansus to one of the most helpful and beautiful theological observations about the incarnation: That which he has not assumed, he has not healed; or put the other way around,, the unassumed is unhealed.

This is beautiful because it is so profound, so utterly all encompassing. In the incarnation God the Son took on the fullness of flesh, the fullness of humanity, such that there

is no corner of our hearts or of the human condition to which God is a stranger. In becoming human in Christ Jesus God is with us; Emmanuel, in such a way that he truly knows us and can act both with us and for us, and therefore on our behalf.

We cannot fulfil the law by ourselves. But Jesus can, and Jesus does. In his body on the cross he brings judgement upon sin and death itself. That which brings about our mortal end is subjected to its own fatal conclusion.

More than this, by his full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world he makes for us the sacrifice which we cannot make. He does not abolish our need for sacrifices to make us holy, he fulfils that need in himself - once and for all. Such that any sins we need to atone for, we find atoned for in him. Such that we should hear the full richness and passion of Paul when he says: *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!*

Paul continues: *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be*

[b]carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the [c]carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (R8:5-9) (NKJV)

Where sin knocks the world spiritually off kilter, Jesus restores it to its rightful orientation in such a way that he puts sin on the backfoot, redefining morality and fairness to find their reference not in the flesh but in the Spirit of God; which is the love of God shared between the Father and the Son - the Love of God for the world which was so great that he sent his only Son so that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life. (J3:16)

If we confess Christ as Lord we become those strange creatures who in this life find themselves living between two realities; the old which is fading even as we shall some day die, and the new which is growing even as we shall on the day when the Lord comes again in Glory be

resurrected to share in his eternal life that never again shall die.

As Paul says: And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (R8:10-11) (NKJV)

He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

This is such a key verse for each of us to take to heart this morning as we prepare to come to the Lord's Table to partake in Holy Communion.

He who raised Christ from this dead; the action of the Gospel has happened, it is accomplished - God has won for us the victory over death.

He... will also give life to your mortal bodies.

The same God who has done this is not content with leaving his salvation as an historical act in the past which we read about in the scriptures but rather shall bring

about that salvation within our own lives now. And just as his victory over death is a physical reality in the resurrection of Christ, so too it takes place within our *mortal bodies*.

All this happens through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Who dwells in you; for having assumed the fullness of humanity that he might heal us fully and by forgiving us make us holy, he whose throne is in heaven above nevertheless pours out his spirit upon us that he might also enthrone himself not just Lord of all Creation, but Lord of our Hearts; vouchsafing to feed us spiritually when we unfeignedly believe his Holy Gospel and eat and drink his body and his blood that shall preserve our bodies and souls unto everlasting life.

Paul may have desired to be able to share this message with the Christians in Rome in person, but personally I am grateful that it was God's will that he be delayed and write this letter so that by hearing his words preserved in the scriptures through the ages, we might be encouraged by his passion and faithfulness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we likewise encourage others in the same. Amen.