**Romans 8:1-11 Homily for 29th March 2020 Passion Sunday**

Romans 8:1-11 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

**8**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, **2**because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. **3**For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, **4**in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

**5**Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **6**The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. **7**The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. **8**Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

**9**You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. **10**But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. **11**And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Other lectionary Readings for Sunday 29th March 2020 are:

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130 and John 12:1-8

With the isolation that most of us are finding ourselves in at the moment, it can lead to really unpleasant feelings of being trapped, and life being at the mercy of forces beyond our control.

It is bad enough for the fit and healthy with the frustrations of time being lost and unable to just get on with life. The worry about jobs and finances can be a huge strain. But for those whose health, age and isolation puts them in a higher risk category, their fear about catching the Coronavirus and how they will cope, can become overwhelming.

St Paul, in his letter to the Roman Church, helped the Christians there to look back at their past lives and understand how truly trapped they had been. They had been bound up with all the rules and problems of this world without looking up to see the glory of God’s love for them, and the spiritual freedom that the Lord brings to his people.

It is this contrast of the worlds ways and life in the Spirit of God that Paul keeps pointing out in the passage, and it is this message of God’s grace that is incredibly relevant to us now.

He reminds the Romans that they all followed a rule of life that was controlled by a very oppressive cocktail of set laws and the guarantee of death.

However you look at it, it means that the world lives under an unbearable burden that eventually breaks us.

We neither constantly hold God at the heart of our lives, shaping our thoughts and actions, nor do we treat our neighbour as we would want to be treated ourselves. We in our own human nature know all too well the wrath and anger that builds up at times, the envy of others and the desire to put ourselves at the very centre of things – the “I” that must come 1st. And at a time of crisis, as we find ourselves in now, we see many acts of great courage and beautiful service to one another, but we also see the symptoms of selfishness creeping in.

As a simple example, just before the lockdown and the lessoning of traffic on the roads, I noticed an increase of intolerance in peoples driving styles. The lack of patience in waiting for others to park, but rather squeeze through a gap to get to their destination to save a few seconds. I noticed the rising anxiety in myself and had to remind myself to be graceful towards others. I am sure others will have noticed it around the supermarkets.

It is what we humans are like without God, and is particularly seen in its ugliness at times when society is stressed. We falter and fall short of living the way Jesus did. For all our lovely moments – we cannot escape from the flaws in our nature, and certainly not by own efforts.

But Paul points us back to the remedy, the offer of God’s own Son Jesus who set us free. When we accept his help and then remind ourselves of it, then all the anxiousness about being good enough, can just fall away.

Paul says that “There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

**No condemnation,** because the law has no hold over us. We realise that we can’t keep the law, so we hold our hands up to Jesus the rescuer like a child to a loving parent, knowing that He is the saviour who has the power and ability to deal with the law for us.

And as we trust him like that – he lifts us up from the rocks of life, from the consequences of our folly, of breaking the law, of guilt over past wrongs, of not saying or doing the right thing at the right time, of the worry about our lives …. He paid the price for us and we have been set free and we have the eternal promise of His blessings upon us.

It may be helpful to pause for a moment here and just reflect on what being ‘set free’ might mean to you.

[Pause]

Did you notice that Paul used the word ‘NOW’ –“there is therefore NOW no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”?

We are to know the relief and assurance in being saved NOW, TODAY. We won’t know or understand it fully now, but we will one day – the day when we meet Jesus face-to-face at the end of our days here on earth. But the freedom to live in its truth is ours NOW! That freedom comes with a blessed gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit, the same spirit of Christ that holds power and life – a power which is divine.

Those rescued have the Holy Spirit of God living in them. And that living is active and real, setting us free from the oppression and burden of trying to live by rules and threat. But are now blessed with a new way to live in this world with God’s ways written in our hearts because His Holy Spirit lives in us.

In other words, our heavenly Father puts the desire in our hearts to want to follow his moral law and the spirit of God empowers us to obey it.

We still can’t do it perfectly in this world, but once a Christian, then our natural inclination is to follow the law. Not because we have too, but because it has become part of us.

This freedom to live in line with our God given hearts desires means that we become more Christ-like.

The movies we want to watch will become more edifying. The books we read and the conversations we have, will be less about our wants and satisfying our own desires, but will focus on the needs of others. We will want our relationship with the Lord to grow richer and deeper.

The security we desire, especially in times of uncertainty, will rest more and more in him, and not in money or how well we are liked, not in how many friends we have or on our comforts, not in our job or past achievements.

The prompting of the Holy Spirit will lead us to become more attuned to God’s concerns and the spiritual needs, hurts and issues of others.

All this is a work in progress, but the Lord knows that. The security that comes from knowing that we are completely loved and cherished beyond measure is a pure and lovely freedom from guilt and anxiety. A blessing gift from God.

A picture, that may be helpful, of the love of God for his rescued children:

A young child who finds their Daddies new and best shirt, wants to iron to for him so that it is ready for his big meeting at work the next day. The child gets the ironing board out and the iron just as he had seen Mummy do it, and irons the shirt introducing more creases than removed. The obvious burn mark on the front is one that nobody could miss - but when Daddy arrives home child runs to him and holds it out saying: “Look Daddy – I did this for you!” And the Father looks and smiles and sees in those creases and burns the love of the child for him and not the marks themselves. The Father cherishes the shirt and wears it with pride to the important meeting the next day.

That is the love our heavenly Father has for us – once rescued, we are his children, always loved and cherished, always secure. With a heavenly Father like that, we are lovingly bound to him through his son Jesus Christ and united in the Holy Spirit.

So, in a time when we may feel physically trapped, our minds are free to love with his love, serve as he has served us, to set our minds to think his thoughts after him, to desire the same things he desires. To live our lives to honour and enjoy him for ever.

What joy, what glory there is in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a message of hope and rejoicing at a difficult time such as we are now experiencing. Amen.

Revd Peter Jones