



## Revd Ro's Reflection on Second Sunday after Trinity

### Proper 6

### Year A

**Romans 5.1-8**

**Matthew 9.35-10.8 [9-23]**

Last time we looked at Jesus raising the daughter of the leader of the synagogue from the dead. Jesus showed that he could do what no other mortal could do, he had power over death. Of course Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, fully human, fully divine and in the power of God he raises the little girl. We have seen him stilling the storm and how he has power over the elements. As the disciples say, 'Who is this that even the wind and waves obey him.'

Just prior to our reading Matthew tells of Jesus' curing of the demoniac,

<sup>32</sup> 'After they had gone away, a demoniac who was mute was brought to him. <sup>33</sup> And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke; and the crowds were amazed and said, 'Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.' <sup>34</sup> But the Pharisees said, 'By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons.' (Matthew 9)

Jesus has power over evil in all its forms and of course he will finally crush the powers of evil on Calvary. When the crowds see it they wonder at his power and are amazed. The powers that be are simply furious; they know that Jesus is a direct threat to their whole system and a threat to their control of people. Those with power rarely want to see it undermined and will take any action to remove anyone who is a threat to their autonomy. So it is with these Pharisees, they say his power is from the demons! Of course that is ridiculous, 'a city divided against itself must fall.' The argument doesn't hold water and in Matthew's gospel we are not told that Jesus even bothered to refute such an infantile argument. Instead he goes on with God's work,

<sup>35</sup> 'Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.'

Jesus must have been exhausted, we are told he often goes to a quiet place to pray, he gets in a boat to try to find a spot where he and the disciples can rest. His task however is a relentless one; there is little time to pause. But the key note here is the word 'compassion.' Compassion is caring love and Jesus turns that love into action as he cures the sick. What he is doing is turning lives around, giving new life to those who have been prisoners of sickness or disability. They are freed now; their lives have been made whole again by the touch of Christ. It is not only the sick Jesus feels compassion for, it is the people who come to him; why? because 'they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' Those who should be caring for them, guiding them in God's way, are corrupt. The people are oppressed, not just by the foreign occupying force from Rome but by their own leaders from Herod down.

When Jesus taught in the synagogue at Nazareth he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah,

<sup>1</sup> 'The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,' (Isaiah 61)

Jesus gives back the scroll and says; 'Today in your hearing this has come true.' Jesus is the one foretold by the prophets, Jesus is the Messiah to whom the scriptures point and here in Isaiah we see his task. Jesus will fulfil all this and much more. No wonder the Pharisees and the rest of them fear him; this is the anointed one who will turn all their ways upside down. He brings a new dawn, a new day and those who turn to him will receive the promises of God. Jesus has chosen the twelve and later they are named but Jesus tells them in no uncertain terms that time is short,

<sup>37</sup> 'Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

There is Jesus himself and twelve poor men, most of them are labourers and fishermen. Few of them would be a normal choice for such a huge task but God does not call those who are seemingly perfect, he calls those whom he chooses. It is a great comfort to know that Jesus wants us all, he calls us all and what he asks is simply for us to do our best to live in his way, according to his teaching. To do what he wants rather than what we want is a tough lesson to learn though.

Well then Jesus knows time is short. In a few years he will have been killed by those he is trying to save. He must pass on the task of taking out the good news of God with the 'few labourers' he has. Put yourself in the disciples' position, they see the wonders Jesus does, they hear his teaching then those words, we need labourers to go out in faith. Then the order comes, I am talking about you. They must have been terrified.

<sup>10.1</sup> 'Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup> These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.' They are not alone however, just as Jesus breathed on the disciples the Holy Spirit at his resurrection, just as the power from on high descended upon his followers at Pentecost, so now Jesus utters the words of authorisation that gives them the power to go out and do great wonders in

God's name. It is authorisation that turns everything around. I remember when I was preparing for ordination looking at the promises the candidates would make to the bishop and saying how can I do all that? My spiritual director smiled and said look at the answer you will give, 'By the help of God I will.' These disciples have received the authorisation of Jesus to go out not in their own strength alone but in his name to do as he has done. I wonder if that authorisation from Jesus gave them confidence and eased their trepidation at his command?

<sup>5</sup> 'These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'

What Jesus says next might seem strange. Do not go to anyone but the Jews, do not go to anyone else. To us this seems exclusive but we know Jesus' words, that he was sent initially to 'the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' So he was, the Jewish scriptures were those of God's people, he had been with them guiding them and rescuing them time and again. God's love never faltered. They however strayed and strayed again and again. The promise was that God would send his Messiah to save them. That is Jesus' mission, to bring God's good news to the Jews initially. With Jesus there is the dawn of a new day, a new way. The old Temple worship is over; the Messiah is here they must turn to his way now. That is the urgent task, to take out that good news and to give them the chance to turn from sin and turn to Christ.

<sup>9</sup> 'Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup> Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.'

This is a detailed set of instructions, there is little time. As you enter a village tell the good news if they welcome you well and good, if not move on there is no time to wrangle. Jesus never hides the dangers to following the way. It will be dangerous, people with power will not want it challenged and Jesus' way is a threat to the status quo. It turns the world's tinsel values upside down and replaces them with God's values. That is not a popular thing to do. You speak God's truth and do not be surprised if people don't want to hear it or turn on you for proclaiming it.

<sup>16</sup> 'See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.'

All this will come true of course in time and indeed it links to the reading from Romans we will look at in a moment. The way of the cross will be walked by Jesus in a few short years and his followers will be persecuted, that is true throughout history and today. But there is a huge but, and it is Jesus' promise to all who follow him; remember, you are not alone.

<sup>19</sup> 'When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; <sup>20</sup>for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.'

This promise is hidden within the passage but it is the most wonderful promise, the Holy Spirit of God is within you, within everyone who turns to Christ. If you think of those Christians down the

ages either persecuted or killed for their faith we marvel at their courage. It is their deep faith that they are not alone, that Christ is with them that allows them to do things which in their own strength they would never have believed possible.

<sup>21</sup> 'Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.'

Here Jesus gives a prophecy, this is how it will be, the way of the cross is not an easy one and families will be divided. Suffering will be the norm because others will hate you. But all the promises of God are given to those who follow Christ in faith.

Here Jesus' instruction is to go to the Jews but so many will turn on him. That indeed is a tragedy, that they do not recognise the Messiah, God incarnate. Instead they call for his blood. We remember the great commission given to the disciples just before Jesus' ascension, now after the resurrection is the time for them to go out to all nations.

<sup>18</sup> 'And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

<sup>19</sup> 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28)

'God sent his son into the world so that all who believe in him might not perish but have everlasting life.' (John 3.16)

God is the creator of all, there is no status with God, and all who turn to him are equally loved by him. Jesus has told the disciples that status has no part with him and it must not with them, they are labourers, servants and they must not think of themselves as superior to anyone else. Jesus is the co-creator of all that is, but he is our servant king and we must emulate that in our lives.

Paul of course knew this, he is the 'apostle to the Gentiles' and he has been hard at work convincing both the Jews and the Gentile converts that there must be no status, no difference between them. The Gentile converts have Abraham as their father too, the scriptures are their scriptures and there must be no superiority or inferiority. Christ died for us all, he loves us all and he has raised us to eternal life.

<sup>5.1</sup> 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.'

Paul makes it clear that we have not earned salvation; it is by the grace of God freely given in Jesus that we obtain his promises. It is only by turning to Christ and living in his way that we will receive the promises of God. Paul is writing to a persecuted church and a church who knew all about suffering.

<sup>3</sup> 'And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.'

What Paul is not saying is that suffering is good, it is never that. However Paul, who has suffered for his Lord, knows that from it positive things can come. I am sure we can all look back on tough times yet acknowledge that we have grown because of them. He is trying to inspire these new Christians not to give up hope in the face of persecution. Jesus foretold what would happen to his followers.

Paul reiterates what Jesus Christ did for humanity at Calvary.

<sup>6</sup> 'For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.'

Jesus walked the way of the cross to save all humanity, Jews and Gentiles. He died in love for all humanity. So, says Paul, Jesus died in love for you when you were living a pagan lifestyle. But you have turned your back on those ways and you have turned to Christ therefore your sins are forgiven and you have eternal life with him. Whatever you have to face, hold fast to the promises you have made and the Holy Spirit of God will be with you to strengthen and sustain you.

<sup>9</sup> 'Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.'

We are all reconciled to God, a relationship that had been broken by sin is restored in Jesus Christ and we are loved by our heavenly Father. We are co heirs with Christ and we can with confidence say, 'Abba' Father. This relationship with God is not distant; it is a close relationship of love. He is close as our own breathing. Our sins are forgiven, the slate has been wiped clean and we have God with us always in his Holy Spirit.

*He opened wide his arms on the cross: he put an end to death by dying for us: and revealed the resurrection by rising to new life. So he fulfilled your will and won for you a holy people.*

Eucharistic prayer B

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