



Revd Ro's Reflection on 21st Sunday after Trinity

Proper 25

Year A

1 Thessalonians 2.1-8

Matthew 22.34-46

Paul begins Chapter 2 by referring back to the experience in Philippi and the shameful treatment they suffered. Despite this he says, 'we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.' Indeed he did and he has left a group of believers in Philippi. It is that same Holy Spirit which is inspiring the work of Jesus Christ and the spreading of the gospel in Thessalonica.

Paul makes one thing very clear. He has come with pure motives, as a messenger from the one true God. It is God who has entrusted these missionaries with his message. God examines their motives as indeed he does the motives of every human being.

⁵ 'As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others,'

Paul is appealing to them to trust him and his co-workers. Trust is necessary for faith to grow. There must be no thought of status, no self-seeking, and no self-aggrandisement. No, Paul is working for God and is inspired by his Holy Spirit and it is that same Spirit which will come to these new Christians if they follow in sincerity and love. Their actions prove that this is the case.

The next part of the passage is an example to any church and to all Christians and Christian leaders. This message is as timeless as it is important.

⁷ 'though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.'

How should we behave towards others? We must behave with gentleness and love. The simile is beautiful. The nurse cares for, protects, nurtures and teaches the child. He could have said 'mother' as easily, for the same applies. Anyone who is a member of the church, indeed all the people we meet deserve to be treated with sensitivity and caring respect.

⁸ 'So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.'

Paul is prepared to give these people all he can, to be totally committed to them because he is acting out God's commission. We are all called to do exactly this.

This is a new community of Christians. They live in a culture hostile to the message of Jesus yet they listen to Paul's message, embrace it wholeheartedly and live it out in their lives. Not only that they actively engage in mission, all this while being persecuted. Actually it is good to measure ourselves against this Christian community.

Our Gospel reading begins,

³⁴ 'When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.'

In the passages that go before this we can see the gathering opposition to Jesus. The Pharisees had just tried to trap him with a question about paying taxes to Caesar. Then the Sadducees, who unlike the Pharisees did not believe in a Resurrection, try to trap him about that.

Jesus had confounded both of them. So we can now understand the first phase in the gospel reading. Now the Pharisees renew the attack, this time asking which is the greatest of the commandments. Jesus answers,

³⁷ 'He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

It is one of Jesus' most famous sayings and it is repeated verbatim in the BCP Holy Communion service.

Jesus is saying quite clearly if you do these things you are doing everything you need to. To love God is paramount, and a person cannot hurt another in any way if they 'love their neighbour.'

Of course this silences them but we need to pause and think about Jesus' words that have become so familiar to us. What Jesus is saying is - this should be the pattern for your lives. It should be the pattern for our lives too. A person cannot call themselves a Christian without living it out. Later we know that Jesus gives a new commandment. He will give that commandment at his Last Supper with his disciples.

³³ 'Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" (John 13)

This new commandment is very different. It is no longer, 'love your neighbour as yourself.' but 'love one another as I have loved you.' Jesus is saying that we must model our behaviour on his. Jesus throughout his life has given us the example of his love. Now at the end he will die for us and all humanity. Only by meeting evil head on can it be vanquished, and God incarnate did that in love at Calvary.

That is the depth of Jesus' love. A love that meant he could forgive those who were hammering in the nails. That is our commandment. It is only by showing love that, 'everyone will know that you are my disciples.'

How well this links with our passage from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. The members of this new community of believers were living it out daily. Paul's affectionate account makes that so clear. I have talked of Jesus vanquishing evil by love. That is cosmic.

Now Jesus turns to the Pharisees and asks them a direct question about the Messiah. It is not often that Jesus does this. 'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?'

They of course give the pat answer, 'The Son of David.'

⁴³He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ "The Lord said to my Lord,

'Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet' "?

Jesus is quoting directly from Psalm 110 v 1. David was traditionally believed to have written the psalms, so Jesus follows with,

⁴⁵ 'If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.'

At one level Jesus is silencing them. They are confounded by his question.

Matthew has made it quite clear that Jesus is descended from David. In fact people often shout, 'Jesus Son of David.'

But David is calling him Lord. So Jesus is the Messiah. What enemies will Jesus defeat? Jesus is not the sort of popular Messiah, the warrior King who will defeat the hated Romans and re-establish Israel's greatness through war and destruction. That is not the way of Jesus. Think of his teaching throughout his ministry. Think of 'love one another as I have loved you,' think of his Sermon on the Mount. No, Jesus will defeat the enemies of humanity, sin, evil and indeed death. He will do that by love. His battle is cosmic. The fight will be at Calvary but he will be victorious. At his resurrection he will triumph over death. Salvation will be won for all who truly believe and try to live in his way. Jesus is the Messiah who has begun the work here but who will be the final judge of the world at his second coming when God's new creation is brought to fruition.

How well our Gospel reading follows from the passage in Thessalonians. In both the pattern of Christian life is made clear. It is up to every one of us to follow Jesus' 'new commandment.'

We cannot do it in our own strength, we do it in the power of the Holy Spirit who strengthens and enables us. We remember Jesus' words 'Matthew 28. 20. 'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Jesus is with us in our lives in times of trouble and joy. It is God's Holy Spirit which will help us as we strive to be 'Followers of The Way.'

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst you and remain with you always.

~~~~~