



Revd Ro's Reflection on The Third Sunday after Trinity Year C 2022

Galatians 6.[1-6] 7-16

Luke 10.1-11, 16-20

There was a choice of readings for this week's Reflection, on Sunday we celebrate the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle. I must admit I was tempted as I have a soft spot for Thomas. Anyone who wishes to can see the reflection for Thomas Year C Easter 2. So I am looking at the readings for Proper 8

The reading from Galatians follows on from last week; we remember Paul had warned the Galatians against being persuaded by vociferous Jewish Christians that to be 'children of Abraham' they must follow the law of the Jews to the letter and initiation to that was circumcision. Paul had strenuously denied this divisive and dangerous teaching as actually anti-Christian. People are saved through Christ alone and he is the fulfilment of the scriptures. All believers have one root and all are Abraham's children. In Christianity there is no first and second class, Jews are not superior to Gentiles or vice versa all are equal before God.

In this passage Paul is offering advice about behaviour within the community of the church. His teaching is as true today as it was for the Galatian church two thousand years ago. He begins with general guidance,

^{6.1} 'My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.'

I like the way Paul addresses them as 'My friends'. He may have to call a spade a shovel when necessary but he always speaks from a deep love. Here he is advocating that they should do the same. Certainly people will make mistakes, they will do things that are wrong and it is up to members of the church to help them in a 'spirit of gentleness.' This means out of care and genuine concern for them. It does not mean crowing about how righteous they are while condemning others. That is typical of the behaviour Jesus condemned in the Pharisees. It does no one any good and is divisive. Paul knows that for this church to thrive, (this applies to any church) they must work together for the good of the whole. Individualistic behaviour is destructive to community.

I have just read a book that is around a hundred years old. It may seem old fashioned but actually what it says holds true for any organisation, any community. It is about a girls' school and the hockey team is full of dissention and feelings of superiority and resentment. Needless to say they win nothing because they are not pulling together. The captain understands that they should be playing for the 'honour' of the school. Their aim should be to focus on what is fair, noble and right, what is best for all not for the individual. Bickering and backbiting will lead only to discontent and destruction. In the course of the novel they do learn that happiness can only be achieved when they work together for the benefit of all. As the head puts it, be guided by what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is what Paul is saying to the Galatian Christians. Their focus must be on Jesus Christ, on his teachings and specifically his commandment to love. Paul has just told them in the previous chapter that the Jewish law is, as Jesus summed up in a few words, 'Love God and love your neighbour'. You cannot do one without the other; he sums it up thus,

'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.'

Put each other first, help each other, and care for each other, that will lead to a secure and fruitful community under Christ.

³ 'For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.'

Paul is very wise and he knows all about human nature and the things that can happen when people come together in a group. Firstly they can look down on each other and that can lead to feelings of superiority, to the establishment of a pecking order and to cliques. That means of course that some people are in, while others of necessity are out. This may be the way of the world but it is not the way of Jesus; this is not the way of St. Paul. If this happens people are being motivated not by the Spirit but by selfishness. The Galatians must turn away from all of that because in Christ all are equal; all are children of Abraham, children of God. If Jesus died to set us free then he died to win this equality for us. God loves us equally so it follows that we must treat each other in the same way. Respect, true community, care and compassion for all are the key. Go back and look at the list of the Fruits of the Spirit; it is by practising these that a community will flourish. This has been Paul's teaching to the Galatians throughout.

⁴ 'All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbour's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁵For all must carry their own loads.'

At first sight this might look as if Paul is advocating the individualistic outlook he has just eschewed. In fact he is doing nothing of the kind; he is substantiating his argument. Put simply he is saying be sure what you are doing is done correctly and take pride in that. Measure your own work or works rather than condemning your neighbour's. Make sure you are living according to Christ's teaching, don't look down on others and don't sponge on them either, pull your own weight. If all pull together then success is much more likely.

⁶ 'Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.'

I think these few words are so apt. Those who have learned of Jesus, who have been taught about him and his ways must treat their teacher with respect and welcome him or her into the community, supporting them and treating them with love in Christ's name and making sure they do not live in want. Conversely the Christian teacher is not superior to the person who receives the word of God. All are equal.

Paul is a straight talker and he proves this once again here,

⁷ 'Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.'

It is very easy to convince yourself it is ok to do something if it serves your purpose, to pretend it won't matter or worse still to get into the habit of committing those sins Paul outlined in chapter 5. Well, says Paul you might turn a blind eye to your own behaviour but God does not. He sees all and knows all. You have won the promises of God in Jesus, but that great gift comes with responsibility. The responsibility is to live in Jesus' way according to his teaching, to care for others and to put their needs before self, to love God and worship him. Remember your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit is given to each one of us and so we must be guided by it. If we live according to the Spirit we will receive the gift of salvation. That is the freedom Jesus won for us at Calvary. It is what Paul means when he says in chapter 5.1

5.1 'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.'

Paul makes his point clear, you are free because of Jesus, don't backslide or let the sins that held you in thrall before take over again. It can be summed up simply in these words, 'Turn from sin and turn to Christ.'

⁹ 'So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.'

These are wonderful words which express a wonderful truth. Keep working for Jesus, be motivated by his teaching and you will receive God's promises in full. It is summed up in these words that should, I think, be the aim of every church.

¹⁰ 'So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.'

Now Paul refers back to his former argument that we have looked at in the past couple of weeks.

¹¹ 'See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! ¹²It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh.'

Firstly Paul shows here that now he is writing himself, with his 'own hand'. He would have dictated this to a scribe but now, at the close of the chapter, as he is gathering his argument to an end he writes himself.

Those Jewish Christians that are putting pressure on Gentile Christians are not acting out of pure motives but selfish ones. To begin with a Jew was not meant to associate with a Gentile so by making the Gentiles accept Judaic law they are side stepping that issue and no other Jews can condemn them. It is like a show off to get these Gentiles to join the 'club' as it were. They are boasting because they have made these Gentile Christians conform. It is about having power over them. We have just seen that abuse of power is not acceptable to Paul. Anyway to accept circumcision is to go back into slavery says Paul. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free. Everyone who turns to Christ is equal and free. There is no need for the mark of the Jewish law on the body, all that is artificial now. It is the marks for Christ on your body you can be proud of, as Paul is, because it means you are standing up for Christ. We know how Paul has suffered and the marks of persecution must have been quite evident. The only thing to boast about is Christ and Christ crucified and risen and exactly what that means for all who truly turn to him.

¹⁴ 'May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁶As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.'

This is the central point. God is making a renewed creation. That new creation began with Jesus Christ, the old was put to death at Calvary. In the fullness of time the new creation will come to fruition with Jesus at its head. Those who have obeyed his commands and worked for him will be welcomed into that newly created order. These are the promises of Christ and it is up to every Christian to work to establish that new order beginning with their own behaviour. Every church, says Paul, must be founded on love of God and love for others and not love of self. If it is to succeed, every member of the church must work for the good of its members in Christ's name, and also look out into the world to take his love to others.

In our gospel reading we have Luke's account of Jesus sending out the seventy. He has already sent out the twelve, Luke 9:

¹ 'Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.' ⁶ They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.' The result of that mission was success. We have seen him give Legion a missionary commission too. The word of God is being taken out by his followers now too. The point is that time is short and the task is huge. God's salvation is wonderful, Jesus is offering a new way of love and peace and eternal life in God's renewed creation. But life was hard for Jesus and it will be for his followers. Most people will simply reject his message and for those who do follow him persecution is a reality. ²³'Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.'

However for all who do accept him the rewards are wonderful. Our passage begins, ^{10.1} 'After this the Lord appointed seventy others.'

What had just happened was that people offered to follow Jesus but had made it clear that other concerns were more important to them. 'Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' (Luke 9.61)

Jesus knows that time is short; we have been told that he has, 'set his face towards Jerusalem'. At Jerusalem he will face the powers of evil and death head on. Now this journey is one way, the people have this chance to hear the message of God's Messiah only once, after that it will be too late. Accept it now and be saved or face destruction. It is a stark message but it is fact. So he sends out the seventy to prepare the ground. They are sent to 'every town and place where he himself intended to go.' There is no point or time for Jesus to go where rejection is a certainty.

Notice that they go out in pairs for mutual support and protection, but they are sent on ahead of Jesus. This is a dangerous mission; the danger of persecution is very real. 'See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.'

They are harbingers of the Messiah. The lack of time is made very clear. The set of instructions given to them by Jesus is absolute. ⁴ 'Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.' So often the concern with material things holds us back, like the 'would be' followers in the previous chapter. This concern leads to a mind-set that is distracted, 'But first let me.' The seventy are to be totally reliant on those to whom they go, if a person is worthy they will be welcomed and fed and supported, they won't need luggage. The urgency of their mission is paramount; don't stop chatting on the road! Go on ahead and scout out the ground. This will save Jesus wasting his time going to somewhere where he will not be accepted. This message is offered to all. If they choose to reject it he will not come back again.

⁵ 'Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

Jesus has given the seventy authorisation from him, from God, they are going out in his name and they have powers to cure the sick and have power over evil. They are to stay in one house accepting hospitality and doing Jesus' work. What they bring is the message of Jesus, the way of peace. This is not just the Jewish greeting 'Shalom' it is much, much more than this. This is the peace of God. This peace is the way of Christ. 'Love your enemies, forgive and don't hate.' This is countercultural. Israel is occupied by the hated Romans, insurrections were common. The Jews awaited a Messiah who would lead the Jewish nation to freedom and overthrow the Romans. Peace was the last part of their plan! But peace and love and forgiveness are the way of Christ. We have only to look at his actions on Calvary to see that, 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' Christians must never condone evil, never collude with it, but Jesus' way of peace is the way of God. Actually he is offering salvation here too. If the Jewish nation does not listen to his way of peace, if they do choose hate and take up the sword and rebel, they will be destroyed. This comes about of course just a few years later in AD 70. The Romans will brutally put down the rebellion and the Temple will be destroyed.

Jesus' message is cosmic, he offers the new way, and he is the fulfilment of the scriptures. In him God's new creation is beginning. On the cross he will defeat the powers of evil and win God's promises for all. However people have free will, choose Jesus and live or turn away and face the consequences.

¹⁰ 'But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near".

¹⁶ 'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.'

It is a wonderful commission and it is the commission of all of us. Jesus is sending these men out in his name and in God's name because he is one with the Father. We see the result of their mission, ¹⁷ 'The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' This triumph over evil and the powers of darkness seems to presage the victory Jesus wins over evil on the cross. ¹⁸ 'He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.' The crushing of evil on Calvary is final and never to be repeated, God in Jesus fights that glorious battle

against sin and sets humanity free. On Easter morning death has no more dominion and we will share eternal life with him in the new creation where death and evil are no more.

¹⁹ 'See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

His followers have the commission from God, they will do wonderful things in Christ but the main point is that through following him they will share in the rewards of God.

Going back to St. Paul's teachings to the Galatians, he makes the point clearly that the rewards won for them by Jesus brings responsibilities. It is not just a matter of teaching about Jesus; it is living out his teachings in their own lives. 'Love God and love your neighbour' are part of the same and shouldn't be separated. The community of the church must seek to do both. This is so often the kernel of Paul's teaching, as it was Jesus'.

'Bind us together Lord, bind us together in love.' Bob Gillman

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