

Romans 7: 15 – 25a

Matthew 11: 16 – 19 and 25 to the end.

LEARNING WITH THE LORD : Fiona M Gardiner, Sunday 9 July 2023

How would you feel if I asked you to turn to your neighbour and tell them one of the most embarrassing things you've done in your life? Appalled? Aghast? Offended? Spoiled for choice?

Don't worry...I'm not going to ask that of anyone! For me, there are just so many moments to choose from! Those moments of lack of attention, lack of thought or sheer accident that are just too awful to talk about.

Then there are all those things that we have done knowingly and deliberately. You know, those things that come back to you in the middle of the night: *Surely I didn't do that/say that/think that! Oh. My. Word! What was I thinking? What sort of person am I?*

One of the things I admire about St Paul is his brutal honesty...even about himself. In today's reading from Romans his frustration at his own human frailties pours off the page, fairly cries down the centuries and finds an answering echo in me.

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do! (v 15)*

The thing about our God is that there is nowhere to hide from the white hot, searing light of his righteousness and his love. In him we find the truth about ourselves, and the truth is that we are flawed, frail human beings, every one of us. Even St Paul. Even Mother Theresa. Even Nicki. Certainly me.

When we come to Jesus and ask him to be the Lord of our lives and to forgive the sin that separates us from the love of God, the answer is immediate and immense and we are set free. We are born again, as Jesus told Nicodemus, of water and the Spirit and a whole new life opens up to us...a life of possibilities and opportunities that we have never before dreamt of, because we are now travelling through life with Jesus as our example and our friend.

We want to be like Jesus. We want to do the things that he did, love as he did, relate to others as he did. We want to feed the hungry, be a voice for the voiceless, stand up for justice. We want to tell the good news of gospel love. And we want to stop being the centre of our own little human universes where only our wants and needs matter.

Last week, Emrys was baptized in the pool outside St Luke's. It was a wonderful service, a moving and joyous occasion...a young lad who has decided to follow Jesus wanted us to be with him as witnesses to his new life of water and the Spirit.

But it doesn't mean that Emrys is now completely saintly and perfect. He is still the lovely lad he is and he will still make mistakes. We'll not hold it against him, will we? Because we ALL still mess up, and that right royally. We're still human, so perhaps it should come as no surprise to us that we are not going to get everything right all the time.

But oh...it's so humiliating. So frustrating.

So, is God even now writing in each of our heavenly report cards in huge red letters: MUST DO BETTER? Are we going to be forever put on the naughty step?

A couple of weeks ago Tudor reminded us that God loves us: yes. He loves us as we are: yes. He wants us to stay like this with all our faults and failings: no! Our God is about transformation, and what is being transformed is us!

I just love how St Paul finishes this little section of Romans. It's all doom and gloom and woe is me as he tells us how all encompassing the struggle with sin is and he finally cries out:

*What a wretched man! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ...Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Being a follower of Jesus means that we are in this life of faith for the long haul. It means that every day is a learning day, and those lessons in humility and repentance and forgiveness are life long, as are the lessons about how to do better, be better, live more like Jesus.

I really value coming to confession, week on week, and having the privilege of confessing our sins together because we are all less than perfect.

Even better is hearing that we are forgiven because of Jesus; that when the Father looks at us he sees the holy perfection of His Son. So I can begin a new week from that new starting place, again, and maybe this week I'll do it all a bit better. That's amazing, isn't it?

Let's not become blasé about just how vast the love of God is, poured out for each and everyone one of his ragamuffin followers!

I know I'm perverse by nature: that is there is a big red button labelled *DO NOT PUSH!* I will be sorely tempted to push it, just to see what happens. The naughty child in me would just love to do that.

But I am not only a naughty child. I am a child of God, born again, redeemed for better things. I need to learn to match my behaviour with my aspirations and to do that I am going to need all the help I can get. I need to know that there is hope!

Come to me, says Jesus.

*'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11, 28 & 29)*

Yoked together with Jesus, walking the furrow he walks, in his company the whole way. Choosing daily to take his yoke onto our frail human shoulders.

Choosing daily to learn to make his nature ours too. Daily. Monthly. Year on year for the rest of our journey through life.

And when we fail, when we shrug the yoke from our shoulders and go our on way and find ourselves yet again deep in the mire, then Jesus calls us back: *Come to me, all you who are bone tired of the old ways and the heavy toll of your mess-ups, and you will find rest for your souls, refreshment of spirit and my presence with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.*

Today, Mike and Charlotte are being confirmed by Bishop Robert in St Luke's. Today is a high point in their faith journey and we rejoice with them, pray for them and support them along the path of their life in Christ. But there will be times when things happen, not everything goes as it should and like St Paul they will know the frustration of not doing the things they want to do and doing the very things they hate. We all will. But it's ok: we won't despair! We'll turn again and run back to Jesus who will flood us with forgiveness, renewal, mercy and rest, and we can begin again.

Remember: every day is a learning day. There is always hope, Always help, always a companion for the way ahead. His name is Jesus. Amen.