

Tidenham, Tutshill, Chase 13/8/23

Romans 10: 9 – Saved

Prayer

Are you saved? Wow! We're probably not used to being asked that quite so bluntly. But can you, Jesus Christ has saved me? Can you say, I know Jesus as Lord and Saviour? In our reading from Romans 10 we heard, *If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* That's God's word, God's promise in black and white; and on that basis I can say, you can say – Jesus has saved me. I know if I preached that in Uganda – as I have done on many occasions – the congregation would burst into singing – the great chorus of the East Africa Revival – *Tukutendereze* - sing it. *Glory to Jesus who has saved us by his death on the cross for us.*

Well, here we are back with Romans – our slightly stop-start series. Is this a fair observation? I don't know but it looks like the boys preach on Romans and the girls on the Gospel? I'm one of the boys – so here we go – Romans 10 it is. It's one of those readings where you think – what on earth is that about – when it starts and then comes verse 9 about being saved. Slog through the undergrowth and then there's that wonderful clearing and view – like over Tintern, although I'm not sure the devil's pulpit is the right phrase in this context!

Sometimes I hear people say - *You've got to have faith* – it's the sort of thing some people feel they should say when there's a dog collar in the vicinity. But I want to say – *have faith in what or in whom?* It really doesn't matter how much faith you've got or how little. What matters is where you place your faith. I may have great faith in the Welsh rugby team that they will win the World Cup in the autumn. But what matters is not how much faith I have but how well they play. Someone who buys a lottery ticket – complete waste of money if you ask me – has some faith that they might win. They won't. I have faith that Anna will cook a lovely meal today – now that's an altogether reasonable faith. But whether I get to eat it does not depend on my faith – it depends on Anna getting down to preparing it in the kitchen. Our Scripture text tells us to have faith that God raised Jesus from the dead. At the heart of the Christian faith is this – Jesus is alive. Christians do not believe in a dead teacher; we believe in a living Saviour. There have been loads of wonderful teachers down the ages – Moses, Isaiah, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and we could broaden that to include philosophers and scientists from Plato and Aristotle to Einstein, Marie Curie and Stephen Hawking. Or broaden it another way to think of great religious teachers – Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, he say and all that. All these and we could extend that list but it would be tedious – all of them have got one thing in common. They are dead. And the one sure thing we can say of all teachers today – they'll die. But there is one name missing from the list – the name of Jesus. Jesus is alive. We sing it. It's there in our prayers – we make our requests in the name of Jesus. It's there in our communion as we receive bread and wine – we welcome Jesus.

At the heart of being a Christian is the truth that we can experience the living Jesus for ourselves. We – being Anglicans and all that – might not feel entirely comfortable with the language of being saved. We might want to say something like – *I know he's there with me, he helps me, strengthens me, gives me peace and hope.* It's very real and we know it is Jesus. He is the one we follow, the one we listen to, the one we try to obey, the one we trust, the one we believe is in control, the one we look to so that he will deliver and save us – yes, there's that little word, *save*. And we might be thinking I don't know very much at all but I believe that Jesus is alive and I do try to follow him as my Lord. Our text from Romans this morning says, *If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your*

heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. And that says it all. It is that simple – believe and own up. You don't need a degree in Theology to be a Christian; you don't need to be old or young, clever or dim. Or even very good or nice. Believe in your heart and confess with your mouth.

Is that the end of the matter? No. It was a wise person who said that in order to explain something simply, you had to understand it profoundly. One of the blessings of retirement I find is to be able to spend some time, not long necessarily, most days with a book that is challenging about the Bible or theology or something – because if Jesus is risen from the dead, that just opens up a huge new world to explore. It's the same with saying Jesus is Lord. As one commentator put it, *the confession that Jesus is Lord meant the acknowledgement that Jesus shares the name and the nature, the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and eternity of the one and only true God.* I wish I could take you to Uganda and along a road that winds through some interesting but not especially fascinating country and suddenly you go round a corner and there before you is the great rift valley, and it is a breathtaking awesome moment. And then we can descend the valley and come to the magnificent Queen Elizabeth Game Park. When we confess Jesus as the risen Lord, it's like turning that corner and there's a new world opening up. That Jesus is the secret of God – amazing, capturing, captivating thought. To believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that he who died on the cross in human agony – lives and has conquered death, broken through – can anyone explain that? Can anyone exhaust that truth? It's a truth bigger than our minds can fathom. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had a vision of a great river. He went in a thousand cubits – about 500 metres and the water was ankle deep; another thousand and the water was knee deep, another thousand – waste deep and then it was too deep to wade in and it was water to swim in, but Ezekiel said, it was a river that could not be crossed. If we confess that Jesus is risen and Jesus is Lord, it is like that river. We can paddle, we can wade, we can struggle to pass through, we can swim in it. The wonderful thing about this good news of Jesus the Saviour is that it is both easily accessible and totally inexhaustible.

So – are you saved? It would be great if we could all go home this morning confident to say yes, I know Jesus has saved me. Do say if you are struggling with that; we can talk more and pray about it. But let's not just think of ourselves – the news that Jesus saves is for everyone. Perhaps not put quite so bluntly – ask the family over dinner if they are saved and you'll either get blank looks or have them spluttering over the gravy... you can be more subtle and sensitive, I'm sure, like saying – *you'll never guess what the preacher asked us in church today – he asked...* take it from there...

Prayer