

Trinity 6. 16 July 2023

Collect

Creator God, you made us all in your image: may we discern you in all that we see, and serve you in all that we do; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon... Bits and bobs sermon about our life in the Spirit (Romans 8:1-11)

Forgive me but today's sermon is quite a bit longer as there are some things to cover as we go into the summer.

The Collect today begins "Creator God, you made us all in your image." But as one of the confession prayers puts it... "we have wounded your love and marred your image in us."

As St Paul might put it. Humanity... i.e. those in Adam... have sinned and therefore that image have been distorted or lost. Nevertheless every single human being, no matter how much the image of God is marred by sin, or illness, or weakness, or age, or any anything else, still has the status of being in God's image. Therefore, every human being is redeemable and worth redeeming... and why God sent his Son, Jesus into the world... to save and redeem... and restore the image of God within us.

And in the coming of Jesus into the world, the way of redemption has arrive and a new and living way... a new humanity has opened up to us.

In Adam (humanity) all die

In Christ, a new humanity is born and we are made alive

In Adam, sin reigns

In Christ, sin is crucified and the Spirit of God reigns

In Adam, our humanity is corrupted and under the slavery of sin

In Christ, our humanity is redeemed and under the freedom and Lordship of Christ

It's one of the most important parts of our faith that Jesus became fully human. He was perfectly human. We are imperfectly human. Those who are in union with him can discover the possibilities of being fully alive as a human being.

To quote Irenaeus Bishop and Teacher of the Faith 130-202AD

"Jesus Christ, in His infinite love, has become what we are, in order that He may make us entirely what He is."

and

"The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and to be alive consists in beholding God."

God loves us as we are, in our marred messy human state, but he has provided a way of salvation through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

Through his union with us... uniting us through baptism in his death and resurrection... there is NEW LIFE ... and a new way of living.

We are no longer under the slavery and bondage of sin and living according to the sinful nature... but now under the Lordship of Christ Jesus and living through grace and in freedom a new life according to the Spirit of God.... And through God's Spirit working in us... the image of God in being restored... we become more fully alive and live the life we have been created to live. It is in Christ and by the power of God, the power of his Spirit... working in us that we fulfil our humanity.

That is a brief and crude summary of where we have got to in the book of Romans!

Paul's writings here and elsewhere are not only about covering deep doctrine. Paul covers the practical aspects of our lives... as we heard last week... the battle between the sinful nature and the Spirit within us.

He deals with disputes and differences, spiritual maturity and immaturity, spiritual gifts, worship, what loving service looks like... so as we are about to go into the school summer holidays I thought I'd take a moment to touch on a few of the practicalities in our life together here as God's people in the Parish of Tidenham.

1. Christian Initiation (beginnings)

What a wonderful couple of weeks it has been seeing Emrys baptised and then Charlotte and Mike together with Fern from Lydney confirmed. Lives touched and changed by the Lord. We have seen and heard about; the power of forgiveness (never underestimate the power of forgiveness – Godfather quote), the power of repentance turning from our own ways to Christ's way, the power of a confession of faith Jesus Christ is Lord, the power of baptism uniting ourselves with Christ in his death and resurrection, the power of confirmation... the power of the Holy Spirit's anointing... to be the people God has made us to be... restoring day by day God's image.

Sisters and brothers, as we have witnessed these Christian initiation rites I am reminded that we are an eclectic bunch here. Indeed I've never worshipped amongst such a mixed bunch of Christians, especially when it comes to Christian initiation.

Years ago in the good old C of E people were christened as babies and brought to confirmation usually aged 11+ and confirmation was the gateway to Holy Communion. Whilst that is still the case for some... it is now much more varied.

We have worshipping together in the C of E those baptised as infants following the example of Lydia in Acts 16:15 "and she (Lydia) was baptised and her household." And we have those who want to let their children make their own decision in good time "repent and be baptised." Acts 2:38

We have people who are taking Holy Communion as soon as they are old enough to eat. We have people who take communion before confirmation. We have people who are confirmed and those who are not confirmed from other churches. We have all kinds of views about the meaning of Holy Communion, Baptism and Confirmation.

Whatever differences we may have the Church of England operates an open table and welcomes all who are part of the Body of Christ, the church. **All are welcome at the table of the Lord** and it's a really beautiful mix.

What is clear from reading the Scriptures is that the ingredients of Christian initiation... i.e. repentance, faith, baptism in water and receiving the Holy Spirit **IS not** neat and tidy and ordered. It comes at different times and different ways to different people. Remember Peter at Cornelius' house Acts 10:47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

Whilst there has to be order and discipline in the life of the church... it is God's order and God's discipline that matters. Repentance, Faith, baptism in water and receiving the Spirit can happen in any order... what matters is that they happen and that we do all we can as a church to nurture and encourage people to follow Christ.

2. Lay & Ordained Ministry

Years ago it was the Vicar and HIS ordained assistants who were in public authorised ministry, whilst the rest of God's people were politely asked to join in with various tasks but were not permitted to take much of a role in public worship and Parish ministry.

Praise the Lord that we have recovered the ministry of ALL God's people, all the baptised. All members (that Pauline term) of the Body of Christ (Romans 12 and 1 Cor 12) playing their part.

We now have men and women preaching and teaching, leading worship, interceding, undertaking pastoral care and more, not because the Vicar isn't here this week and shoes need filling but because it is the right and good thing to share ministry and exercise the gifts of God within the church, the Body of Christ.

It's a massive cultural shift from when I was a child... a shift in the Spirit and of the Spirit of God. A body alive and functioning from head to toe!

We believe in every member ministry. Just as this building is made up of stones and no stone is more important than another.... so also the Church is made up of many members, each with a different part to play... ordained and lay people together.

It is one of the most joyous parts of being the Vicar here that so many people exercise ministry within the Church... gathered in here and scattered out there, up front and behind the scenes. And it is a privilege to share ministry with you. Sharing ministry makes communication a challenge. We will make mistakes and we may find it costly and a struggle at times... but as we serve the Lord and one another and give things a go in faith, we will hopefully grow and learn and glorify God.

It's great to commission Sue, Susanna, Mary, Linda, Rosalind, Leonie and Kathy as pastoral visitors. Of course pastoral care is a responsibility that belongs to ALL of us... we're all called to love our neighbour and respond to need... but these folks have been commissioned to undertake certain specific pastoral duties.

It was great to commission Aaron, Shleah, Jono, Corette, Emma, Nicholette, Polly and Tanya last week as worship leaders. We're all called to worship but these folks will play a particular part in helping to lead and facilitate our worship together.

We must listen to the promptings of the Spirit to hear what God's call is for each of us in the gathered Church in this place in this generation. When we come together what gifts do you/we bring? We can't all be preachers. We can't all play the piano. We can't all operate the PA desk or give hospitality. But we are all members of the Body with a part to play.

We also notice when there are gaps in the stonework of the Church and there are gaps here.

We need people with gifts in finance and administration. We need people with Governance skills. We need people to organise hospitality. We need people who can lug chairs around. We need people to work with our children and young people... called by God to build up the Body of Christ in this place.

The harvest is plentiful but even with such an amazing Body here... the workers are still few.

Who amongst us is God raising for the tasks God has called us to undertake as his people? Remember St Barnabas, who nurtured and encouraged people. Who do we need to be nurturing and encouraging?

3. Finally, culture...

Finally, I just wanted to say something about our culture here. What is culture? The way we do things around here. Or rather, the way God has called us to do things around here... in this part of his Church.

Being a diverse, eclectic people... with different backgrounds, traditions, likes and dislikes... we are called to do relationship well with one another here. That doesn't always mean agreeing or having the same likes... it means working through tension and conflict, doing disagreement well, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, loving one another... doing the one another's. Trying to find the best in one another, seeing the image of God in another. Doing community well. Being a witness to those around us.

God has gathered us together to do relationship well. As we gather we welcome one another as we would welcome Christ. As we see each other may we notice the image of God in one another.

Notice the people you don't know.

Notice those who are new.

Notice those who may be uncomfortable

Notice where God may be at work in someone.

I've just talked about every member ministry. God has called us to notice one another and collaborate together. Working together in the Gospel cause.

God has called us to worship together. Connecting with each other will only work if our connection with God is right and that our connection with God is foundational to everything. A life immersed in the depth and breadth of God's Spirit... immersed in prayer and immersed in Scripture and immersed in love and mercy will enable a life together as the people of God and restore God's image in us. We need freshness in our worship... we need a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit – we can only fully live the life we've been created to live with the Creator's Spirit working in us. We need renewed love for the Lord and another and renewed commitment to a life in the Spirit who empowers and enables us to fulfil the calling to do relationship well with those 'out there' with whom we live our lives... at home, places of work, places of learning, places of recreation and rest.

For those who do not know our parish vision... it's summed up as

Living Life Together in the Flow of God's Love.

May God give us fresh vision of our shared humanity and shared life together.