

Meditation – Eric Smith

(3:00) Thoughts for the Third Sunday after Trinity

The Collect and psalm are from the Book of Common Prayer, the readings from the Authorized version of the bible are those specified in the Common Worship Lectionary.

(3:13) The Collect

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(3:34) Verses from Psalm 89:

- 1 My song shall be always of the loving kindness of the Lord:
with my mouth will I ever be shewing thy truth from one generation to another.
- 2 For I have said, Mercy shall be set up for ever:
thy truth shalt thou stablish in the heavens.
- 3 I have made a covenant with my chosen:
I have sworn unto David my servant;
- 4 Thy seed will I stablish for ever:
and set up thy throne from one generation to another.
- 16 Blessed is the people, O Lord, that can rejoice in thee:
they shall walk in the light of thy countenance.
- 17 Their delight shall be daily in thy Name:
and in thy righteousness shall they make their boast.
- 18 For thou art the glory of their strength:
and in thy loving-kindness thou shalt lift up our horns.
- 19 For the Lord is our defence:
the Holy One of Israel is our King.

(4:35) The Old Testament reading is written in the twenty eighth chapter of the book of the prophet Jeremiah beginning at the fifth verse:

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the Lord,

6 Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the Lord's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place.

7 Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people;

8 The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence.

9 The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him.

(5:40) The Epistle is written in the sixth chapter of the epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans beginning at the twelfth verse:

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

- 21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.
- 22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.
- 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- (7:38) The Gospel is written in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew beginning at the fortieth verse:
- 40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.
- 41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.
- 42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.
- (8:17) A 'Thought for the Week' from John Beaven one of the Lay Readers in the benefice:

**Set free to serve? Living the new life
Romans 6:12–23**

In these difficult times of the global COVID19 pandemic I, like many, have been looking for the silver linings in these dark times. What will be different as we emerge from lockdown? Will we be kinder, more aware of our neighbours, travel less, hold low paid care workers in greater esteem, be more willing to live differently to preserve our fragile environment?

Will we be as selfish or will we value other lives more as we look across the world in all its diversity and difficulty? Will we really live differently, when we are free again? I am hopeful and pray that we will emerge from this, despite the disruption and economic devastation, with some positives and a better, kinder, wiser way of living.

It was therefore somewhat depressing to hear a trailer on the radio for a program on just this theme, which implied that studies of previous disasters indicate that we don't learn from them or change our behaviour. Let us pray that it is not so this time.

Paul writes to the early Christians in Rome about a radical change in behaviour that he expected to see in their lives after the most transforming experience of any life, their coming to faith in Christ. In Romans 6:1-11 he sets out how they have been given a fresh start, been made 'new creations' through Jesus' death, resurrection, forgiveness and transforming power. What will they do with the gift of new life? What would you do?

Amidst all the complexities and complications of life, each one of us faces a simple, binary choice: to live for ourselves or to live for God. Left to ourselves, we naturally default to the former and pay the penalties. To become a Christian is to be set free from the power of those old ways and the ultimate penalties of them, but the choice we face each day is the same, stark choice: to live for ourselves or for God.

Who are we living for when we choose how to spend our money or to pursue more, when we roam online, when we choose who we befriend, when we choose how to spend our time or how much to indulge those powerful urges to live the way we want to? When we choose to live for ourselves, we choose to be less than what we really are, what God made us to be.

How often though do we find it hard and fall back into living in the old way, despite the opportunity of a fresh start? There have been several points in my career as a GP when someone I know with alcohol dependence has been granted a fresh start, after detoxification therapy, and then sadly been drawn back into drinking again and experienced again its destructive power. I wish that they had never drunk alcohol again.

Paul's desire is that the Roman Christians, having been set free from sin (at the cost of the life of Jesus, the Son of God) would not continue to live in the same old ways, for themselves.

It may sound strange for Paul to speak of us as becoming slaves of God, having been set free from slavery to self-centred living, to sin, by Jesus and His death on the cross. We rightly condemn human slavery but yet in Roman times there are recorded incidences of slaves, having been set free by their human master, choosing a new master and choosing to serve them as a slave.

Presumably they counted the sacrifice worthwhile, knowing that they would be well treated by a good and well chosen master and have all of their needs met, rather than having to fend for themselves in a hostile world. Many in the world may see Christians as slaves to rules, restricted in our freedom to live life to the full and slaves to an eccentric religious way of life but we can be confident from the promises we find in the Bible that to serve God wholeheartedly is to become whole, complete and fully alive. "If the Son of Man shall set you free you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). It's a positive choice we make, to live life to the full.

In what areas of our lives are we still living for ourselves? Where do we so easily fall back into old ways? What would those areas of our lives look like if we lived them fully for God? – try to imagine how they would be different. It is not easy to learn to live differently, and what transformation there has been in me has certainly not happened overnight!

But we can all desire to make the most of the new start that we are given when we are set free by Jesus; we can look to Him for the strength to hold to a new path and we can invite His Holy Spirit to carry on that transforming work in us. To borrow the words of Captain JeanLuc Picard and make them a prayer:

*Make it so, Lord. **Amen***

(13:50) Sortie in E flat – Louis Lefébure-Wély

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