
Sunday 14th June 2020 – The First Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Romans 5:1-8 & Matthew 9:35-10:8

Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and illness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Reflection

Looking at these two passages, the thing that draws them together is suffering. In our verses from Mathew, we see Jesus healing every disease and sickness, and when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless. (V36). In our passage from Romans we pay attention to suffering.

Jesus never said that if we follow him, we will have a life free from suffering. In fact, quite the opposite. He wasn't afraid of talking about suffering and did not shy away from preparing us for suffering.

I wonder how your experience of lockdown is so far. The phrases 'harassed and helpless' and 'suffering' certainly ring true for the people I see around us.

I was so encouraged to read again that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character. I'd really like a better character! And it's true that character doesn't mature when life is easy, if anything we get lazier and more selfish when life is easy! I've been thinking about why suffering produces character. I wonder if it's because we have to face the same thing again and again. We have to practise, and as we all know, practise makes a little bit better! What part of your character can you see being changed in this season?

For me the Lord is definitely teaching me patience. I'm learning to take a deep breath and look at this situation from the children's perspective. Or my parents'. I am having to practise patience. The thing about practising is that we are not perfect straight away. We have to try again and again. We have to look at where we get things wrong. We have to be humble and ask God to help us. I can see as the weeks are going on that I am getting a little bit less frustrated, or I am dealing with outbursts in a more helpful way. The most beautiful thing about this part of Romans is that after character growth comes hope. It's like a sprinkling of God's goodness over the top. It's like fresh green shoots after the rain.

The message translation puts it like this 'we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit'.

So we have a choice. Our choice is to look to God and shout our praises to Him because He is good and He is at work in us, or we can look at our troubles and be down hearted.

The thing is that God is here, He is with us, He is good, and He has compassion on us.

Back to Mathew for a moment, Jesus calls his disciples to him, gives them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness, and sends them out with this instruction 'freely you have received; freely give'.

What blessings has God poured out in your life by the Holy Spirit? Maybe you would like to spend some time with Him today and ask Him how He is calling you to freely give these to other people?

Perhaps spend some time remembering how your character has been matured in the difficult seasons and ask God for hope for the future. Maybe pray for healing for people known to you.

And just one final thought. Mathew 10:7 says “as you go, proclaim this message; ‘The Kingdom of Heaven has come near’”. When you go anywhere, you take Jesus with you. His Holy Spirit is at work in your life too, so wherever you go, God’s Kingdom is.

Gen Rylett