

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 14th June 2020
1st Sunday after Trinity

Collect

God of truth,
help us to keep your law of love
and to walk in ways of wisdom,
that we may find true life
in Jesus Christ your Son.
Amen.

Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Matthew 9:35-10:8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as 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 Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment."

Sermon

I wonder how often over the past weeks and now months you have had cause to stop and think about something you would previously have taken for granted. In the first weeks of lockdown, I heard conversations in which people were wrestling with what exactly they were able to do – and perhaps what they could get away with. Was it really only once a day that we could go out of our houses? What might count as daily exercise? How often might we need to pick up that essential item in the local shop? The seriousness of the situation meant that staying at home became the norm for all of us, but there was room for debate in the fine detail. And as lockdown is very gradually being eased, there is even more room for interpretation.

There is something quite exhausting about having those things that we have taken for granted swept away. Being forced to think each time we want to do something or meet up with someone – to decide what fits within the guidelines, both in letter and in spirit – takes energy. And if you tend to have opinions about what other people are doing, that can be tiring, too.

All of this reminds us that we create habits for a reason. In the normal course of events, the routines that we establish – work, exercise, weekly activities, shopping, cleaning, going to church – mean that we don't have to think too carefully about our every action, freeing up our mental energy to engage elsewhere.

And yet sometimes it can help us all to break out of those routines and habits in order to remember their deeper purpose – and perhaps even to question whether they are still what we feel we are being called to do. In more normal times, we know that holidays are an important time of refreshment, allowing us freedom from the usual expectations, and sometimes helping us to see things in a slightly different perspective. While there have undoubtedly been some very difficult consequences of lockdown, I have also heard people express ways in which it has enabled them to see situations differently. One friend explained how she suddenly realised just how unhappy she had become in her workplace. It was only when she felt the relief of not having to go in every day, that she could recognise the extent of her stress.

At the beginning of this morning's gospel reading, there is a most wonderful phrase about Jesus: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." It is the most extraordinary comfort to remember that when we are feeling at our most frazzled and uncertain, the response of Jesus is one of compassion. And it is helpful to remember that the root meaning of compassion is to "suffer with". Jesus's response to our distress isn't judgemental or detached. He places himself right alongside us and experiences our discomfort. Whenever you are in need of comfort, remember that Jesus always looks with eyes filled with compassion. Sometimes that is all we need to hear.

And sometimes we need to hear more. Sometimes we need to hear our own name among the list of Jesus's disciples, and ask what it is that we are being called to. If ever we think we're not up to the task, we only need to look at the motley bunch of disciples to know that Jesus doesn't call us because we're perfect. Rather he calls us because he's perfect; and because he believes in the work of the Father.

Listen carefully to the work we are called to. Jesus was teaching; proclaiming the good news of the kingdom; and curing disease and sickness. We are called to follow him by curing the sick, raising the

dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons. And we are to do so freely. It sounds like quite a weighty commission, doesn't it? And perhaps a little beyond our pay grade. But I wonder whether that's where we need to turn our perspective round. This is what Jesus asks of us, and he knows us and has compassion for us. So somehow what he's asking must be possible. Or perhaps more specifically, with God's help it's possible.

Each one of us will hear Jesus's call in different ways. Curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons may sound like a very specific list, but Jesus was speaking to real people at a particular time in history. The question for us is what it means for each one of us today. They are words that speak of wholeness; of healing; of bringing life; of being freed from unnecessary burdens and constraints.

I spoke earlier about the way many of us have been jolted out of our usual routines. While that undoubtedly presents challenges, it also provides an opportunity to re-evaluate the foundations of our usual routines and habits. Many years ago, a work colleague noticed that I had a habit of putting myself down. Of always emphasising what I was bad at. It was a habit that had developed because I was managing a number of staff who were older than me, and as my first management experience, I somehow felt that downplaying my own abilities would reassure others. My colleague helped me to break the habit by explaining why he felt it was important, and giving me a look whenever I strayed into self-criticism.

While I wouldn't necessarily describe the habit as a demon, there was freedom not only for me, but for everyone in the office when we were released from it.

Wherever we are involved in bringing wholeness, healing, in releasing people from burdens, we are involved in God's work. It will look different for each one of us, and our actions may be on a very small scale, but they are no less significant for that.

St. Paul's letter to the Romans describes God's love being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. In Sunday Club last week, our children put a mint into a bottle of cola and watched the drink overflow. We're called to welcome God's love into our hearts, and then to overflow with that love for others, bringing life and love to others in whatever ways we can.

Amen