

Sermon – Rev Theresa Jones

Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11.16-19, 25-end

I must admit, when it comes to choosing what to speak about in a sermon I have a tendency to pick from the readings, the bits I like best. But it's not always possible.

For example, today I don't find a lot of clarity in Paul's Letter to the Romans, in fact it's a challenge. I've had to wrestle with it. He seems to be struggling as he analyses his own psyche. Firstly, he says: 'I do not understand my own actions'. Then he says 'I do the things I hate'. He knows what is right and, as an educated Hebrew, he understands the Law but even he, who had experienced a stupendous conversion on the Damascus Road, fails to live up to his own expectations. Here we discover how he grapples with the conflict in his mind and he blames it all on the sin that dwells within him.

Day by day we all have to pitch our human nature against our desire to be better or more perfect than we are. As Paul finds, it's very hard to do. It may be in little things: being patient with others, not getting angry or flying off the handle, not gossiping about someone or judging them, not being too self-centred. For some of us time spent in 'lockdown' may be a constant challenge to our patience.

As Christians we set high standards for ourselves. If we pray or if we read the bible, if we examine our conscience, from time to time, things emerge which, like Paul, we find cause us to fall far short of the kind of people we aspire to be. Paul tells us that he 'delights' in the Law of God. The Law would have been his reading of the first five books of the bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. He was well versed in these scriptures but he knew that his nature was not fully redeemed and so he had to keep putting up a fight against his tendencies to behave in ways that he knew were a source of grief to God.

Jesus, in the gospel reading today, shows great insight into human nature. He's aware that adults can behave like children. When John the Baptist was with them they said he had a demon, they didn't understand him or his strange clothing or his behaviour. Although many came to be baptised they still viewed John with suspicion. His presence and meagre way of life was a mystery to them and something they criticised. And now here is Jesus among them, mixing with everybody and anybody, not keeping himself aloof, caring for the outcast and

the despised; eating and drinking with those who are seen as unsavoury characters. This all leads to him being called a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners. Jesus shows that the people behave like spoilt children, they are impossible to please.

Jesus came to bring change. Most of us don't like too much change. We prefer the comfort of our familiar ways and lives. How very changed life has become in recent months for all of us. Changed in that we can't go to church as we used to, can't go shopping without considering the risk we might be taking, can't go off on holiday or mingle freely with our own families, can't go to the cinema or theatre. Great changes indeed. The change that Jesus brought, however, invites us to be like him, to spend time in prayer, to question our values and to seek God and his will for our lives.

Jesus tells us that God has put all things into his hands; he is able to show us the way. He calls us to come to him if we're weary and carrying heavy burdens. How many of us feel the weight of burdens, of worries, of responsibilities? But here, if we take his advice, he assures us that we **will** find rest. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he is identified as 'The Lamb of God', pointing to his crucifixion. As we say in the Holy Communion service: 'Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' and so we can offer to him the burden of our own sins. That way we'll share in his blessing and find a holy rest for our souls. We'll have greater confidence in the God whom we trust to give us strength day by day and an improved attitude to other people and their needs.

Although St Paul cries out to be rescued from his body which he sees as the cause of his sin Jesus wants to take the whole of us, body, mind and spirit and instil us with a new outlook, a new purpose, and a new and greater reliance on his message to us so that we may rejoice in God's goodness and love. As our Collect Prayer for today states: 'With you as our guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not our hold on things eternal'. Amen.