

Sunday 10th September 2023.
St John's 9am and Christ the King 10.30am

Ezekiel 33:7-11
Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 18:15-20

When I first looked at the readings of Matthew, Romans and Ezekiel they all seemed to me to speaking roughly the same things and that is about being disciplined, about love and forgiveness and what to do if you can't reach somebody, helping others to overcome their bad decisions, and a need to know when to walk away when the person refuses to listen or constantly reverts to his sinful ways and ends up in death. Sometimes it can be a physical death, or it can mean that the person has died spiritually by never giving up on their ways that will lead them to self destruction.

I think it's fair to say that nearly all of us have someone we truly value if it's a family member for example, then this person we usually put before anything else like our friends, our job or members of a club we might have joined, if they need us we will always put them first.

Jesus teaches us to value each other as if we are blood related kin, which of course we all are as we are one in Christ Jesus.

This means if we were to see one of our family, friends or any other we truly love, going the wrong way, wouldn't we at first try to reach them ask them what are they doing, why are they doing it, maybe even try to help them find a different way to do things, even bail them out, but if all of this fails you start to ask others for their help with this person. You all gather together, pray together try to reach out to them, help and teach them good decisions, encourage them to achieve this. Hopefully they start to change their ways and even if they slip back we all try again. Jesus never gives up on us, he gives us chance after chance to allow ourselves to fully redeem ourselves, so shouldn't we give the same to them?

If we do nothing, just decide we have had enough, let them get on with it, then we where are we in this? Surely to stand by and just watch is as a big as a sin as the one they are committing? we all should have the chance to redeem ourselves and some need that help to do so.

How much help though is hard to define, also for the person to receive this help, also to do something to help themselves. We can't do everything by ourselves sometimes we need to ask for professional help for this person. Yet some people will never change their ways, but we can continue to pray for them, if that's all now, we can do for them after trying and offering our help gets refused, our message is not heard and they simply intend to do whatever it is that ails them continually.

It's not easy loving someone who is constantly going off the rails. Tough love is needed, sometimes you have to literally let them go in the hope they will find their own way back. Jesus knows and understands us all, he knows when we have tried, he knows when they have tried.

We are all capable of going off the rails as there is a very thin line of separating good actions and the bad. We at some point have all made a bad choice, maybe something minor, but we need to admit we were wrong, maybe say sorry to a person if was against them, ask for their forgiveness, but some people do commit awful things, these are crimes of murder, grand theft, massacres of which is beyond our comprehension, and lots more actions we can all think of. Can we forgive them? Does Jesus forgive them?

Jesus tells us if we repent of our sins then we will be saved. it sounds so simple and in one way it is, but how many of us can truly put a hand on our heart and say we have gone back to everyone we have hurt, or done something wrong against and asked for their forgiveness ?

In Romans we see the commandments of do not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness against a neighbour or covet his things. These commandments could be simply summed up as love the lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourselves. Love is a fulfilment of the Law.

Ezekiel is telling us never give up on trying to help another see good from bad, as doing bad deeds has a far wider connotations of wrecking families, friends, and community lives.

We will be saved as long as we have tried to help others seen the hurt we have caused others and asked for their forgiveness or at the very least asked Jesus, but if we like them refuse to listen and it's our own free will to continue to do wrong, then we will eventually lose our spiritual lives.

In Luke's gospel chapter 16 verses 19 to 31 we first hear of the great divide of heaven and earth. We hear of the story of a rich man who is unnamed and a poor beggar called Lazarus (not the other Lazarus who we hear more about) who when they both die the rich man goes to hell and Lazarus into heaven.

Here is a clear indication that heaven and hell exist and the rich man even though he is in hell still sees Lazarus as something of a lower person than himself by asking to be allowed for Lazarus to come and cool his tongue. Even then he still sees he has done no wrong.

This free will of his was to think he was better than the rest because of his money and status it has led him into hell and he still wants Lazarus to wait on him do his work, go tell his family members so they won't suffer the same fate. He has still not grasped the facts that he did not heed what the the prophets were telling him and that it's now up to those family members to listen to the prophets or receive the same fate as him.

The facts remain that we are all Christian brothers and sisters, not just as members of an organisation but we are born of the same father in heaven, we all have a special relationship with God the Father, and not only should we serve him, but serve one another too.

If we cannot reach someone, if someone deceives us that they are really good, then go on to commit a serious crime, then we cannot stop this, we have to allow justice to be meted out by the courts etc, sometimes we feel it's not enough, we get angry, we might even take a stand against it, but it's God who is the judge of all and some will end up on the other side of the heaven and hell divide.

We can all do bad, it is really up to us to use our free will in the right way or repent and change our ways when we see the error of our ways or we want to walk in the light rather than in the

darkness of our minds. God will always rejoice when one sinner is saved. Never give up on doing good.

What does it mean to lose our life to Christ?

It means giving our life over to him to use it through us to do his kingdom's work. We do it by helping others in their needs and by the sharing of our faith, talking about our faith, explaining to others how God loves us so much that he gave us his only son Jesus. This very same Jesus gave his life on the cross to redeem us all, but to be redeemed we need to follow and walk in all his ways. Have faith and keep that faith.

Jesus doesn't want us to lose our life by dying, before our life span, but to simply give him our lives to use to his praise and glory, to love one another as he has loved us. He knows we are going to struggle with this, as he came here on to earth born as man and walked about among us.

Jesus offers us the freedom to go back to redeem ourselves with everyone we have hurt or done something against, the chance to say sorry, to be remorseful, try to mend broken relationships, instead of brooding over our mistakes, if we truly want to say we are sorry it's best to go to the person and ask to speak to them directly and privately, we need to do this face to face however hard we may find it, it's really facing up to our sins and admitting we have done wrong.

Our lives are happier and richer in relationships when we can be open, without deceiving one another and trying to forgive others in our midst who have committed serious crimes, if all we can do is wait for our courts to mete out justice and pray for the victims of these crimes then in Jesus' eyes, he knows we have tried. God is the overall judge and we never really know what he decides, but I know he never gives up on us, he gives us chance after chance to do what is good and right, so never give up on doing good, forgive others and love your neighbour as yourself.

Let us Pray

Dear Jesus we need you in our lives and we thank you for dying on the cross for us all and for our sins. We open the door of our lives to receive you as our lord and saviour. Thank you for forgiving us our sins and giving us eternal life in heaven with you. Amen.

