

Sermon for 13th September, Trinity 14

Sermon Being a Grace-Church

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts
be pleasing to you O Lord our Saviour*

Introduction

In the world we are to exhibit the character of our God. Truth and love should dance together in our lives in a beautiful tango

✘ **PSALM 114** Our Psalm reading tells us something about God – a God who can only be known if he chooses to reveal himself. This he does in creation, in his people and, of course, most clearly and dramatically, in the incarnation – Emmanuel, God with us.

In this Psalm we discover that God is happy to draw close to us - ²*Judah became **God's sanctuary**, Israel **his dominion*** – the God whose power and work causes the sea, the Jordan river and the mountains to tremble – is the one who makes himself present with his people. For his people, he *turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock **into springs of water***.

This is grace – it is a God who at all times humbles himself in order to enter into relationship with humanity. To bless is to bow the knee and God in his infinite love and grace, bows the knee to us – we in response, bless him by bowing our knee to him.

✘ **OLD TESTAMENT READING Exodus 14.19-31** Here is the presence of God in action – the story is the crossing of the Red Sea. The Israelites are fearful, all looks lost. Their enemy is much stronger ... and then God intervenes. His messengers the angels are there protecting the people of God ... but even greater is the pillar of cloud and fire – cloud by day and fire by night. This is the sign of God's presence. When the pillar stayed, they stayed. When the pillar moved, they moved. God's presence was real and active.

Would it not be great to have God obvious in such a way? I think of guidance as the pillar of cloud. I am in a place as long as the cloud seems settled. When I feel it begin to shimmer, I wonder if it is time to get ready to move. Sometimes then the cloud settles back and other times it moves ... and I have to move also.

This view of God, though, is quite impersonal. He shows his love and grace in a most powerful way.

The New Testament, though, leads us into a more intimate view of God. When you read the Old Testament it is full of God's grace. Read Deuteronomy, Ruth, Psalms and Isaiah in particular – but it is there throughout. However, it is only in Christ that we see God's grace in its fullest.

✘ **GOSPEL Matthew 18.21-35** Our Gospel reading introduces us to the personal side of grace. The Old Testament readings was about the powerful presence, this is a personal presence. It is presence that should enable us to live as God would have us. If God forgives us ... we have to keep on forgiving others. Forgiveness is not the same as trusting ... that is to do with wisdom. Forgiveness is letting go of hurt and disappointment, it is refusing to hold grudges and this allow bitterness to grow within us. If we were to appreciate the enormity of God's grace and favour, if we were to understand the depths of God's forgiveness then we would not be like this servant who despite being forgiven much refused to forgive others a little. Our Gospel reading in Matthew 18 finishes with: ***.³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?*** ³⁴*And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire*

debt. ***35So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.***

Forgiveness is serious stuff. We are to be judged if we don't forgive. Forgiveness is necessary in friendship, marriage and the family, at school, work or church. Our attitudes have to be gracious – treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves. There is to be no cheap grace – forgiveness is meant to make a difference to how we live. I want us always to be a grace-filled church – a church full of forgiveness, affirmation and love. We are well on the road to that I believe but let us never rest .. we want to be like Jesus!

So if this is so, how would we treat others? Our reading from Romans 14 gives us some hint.

✘ **NEW TESTAMENT READING Romans 14.1-12** We recognise that Christians have different views, some believe one thing, others another; some prefer one thing, others another. Some are vegetarian, others like meat, some are more expressive in worship, others more meditative. The lessons of this passage is clear:

1. We must not spend our time quarrelling: arguments are won more by love than arguing. V1
2. If God welcomes them, how can I not. v3 ***for God has welcomed them:***
- 3.v4 All are accountable to God, not to us: ***It is before their own lord that they stand or fall.***
4. v4 In the end we have to trust God for others. ***for the Lord is able to make them stand:***
5. v5 This does not mean we should be woolly or undecided in what we believe. Rather, ***Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.***

Then Paul goes to to some principles to remember:

- ✘⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so ***then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.***
- ✘ For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God.
- ✘ every knee shall bow to me, every tongue shall give praise to God.'
- ✘ ***12So then, each of us will be accountable to God.***

Some things to remember

1. Primaries and secondaries: we need to be clear about which is which. What things are key to faith and which are secondary. The reason we worship with creeds and liturgy is because it teaches s what are th primaries.
2. Where Christians disagree: how we disagree is important.
3. This does not mean there are to be no standards in the Christian community and anything goes ... no, Scripture is very clear when it wants to be – and unclear when it wants to be! Scripture stands against all societies, all politics, all movements and urges us to live our lives in the light of **the judgement seat of God**. We live in the world, but it is to God we all have to be accountable for our attitudes and behaviour. As in Philippians 2, it is to him that **every knew will bow**.

A final word

These words are addressed to the whole church. The work of the church is not only the work of the minister. We are all responsible for each other. I would say, please be realistic in expectations of each other but in love, serve each other.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

