

## Sunday Scribblings No.17 – 6<sup>th</sup> after Trinity

Lectionary readings<sup>1</sup> for today are;

**Psalm 86:11-17. Isaiah 44:6-8. Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43. Romans 8:12-25**

We start today's Scribblings with one of the five psalms labelled in the NIV as "A prayer of David".

### \*\*\*\*\* Psalm 86:11- 17 \*\*\*\*\*

I like to call it a 'Rescue Me Psalm' because if you are having trouble with your prayer life this is a really good place to start the remedial works and effect a rescue. You don't have to think too deeply, just read it all and soak up its guidance and truth. I say 'guidance', rather than 'teaching' as some will argue that there is no such thing as 'teaching' ... only 'learning'.

So maybe that is exactly what we should be doing with this psalm – learning.

- ❖ Learning how to petition God; how to lament; how to honestly bring our position before God, just as David does in v1-7.
- ❖ Learning how to give testimony to God's omnipotence and transcendence, just as David does in v8-10.
- ❖ Learning how to give thanks and praise; to ask for protection; to ask for mercy and a sign that God loves You, just as David does in v10-17

Pay particular attention to verses 2, 5, 13 that have covenantal undertones;

**"<sup>2</sup> Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; <sup>5</sup> You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.**

**<sup>13</sup> For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead."**

I'm particularly struck by David's honesty. No contrite miniscule details that use up valuable bandwidth. No chitter chatter. No tirade of self-pity. Instead, a petition to God for mercy and a request for a sign of His goodness.

Bang, wallop, and 'here God are my problems'.

Maybe that's something we should try ... less appeasement. More honesty. More praise. More gratitude. More trust. More hope.

### \*\*\*\*\* Isaiah 44:6-8 \*\*\*\*\*

Before you read this passage, I'd like you to think about where you are in relation to the Old Testament.

**Question:** Do you think it's all 'old' mumbo jumbo that belonged to an ancient people and no longer has any relevance to our modernity?

Or do you, like me, think that it's highly relevant and forms the very foundation of our Christian faith?

Why do I believe this? Put simply, because The God who made all the OT promises and is the same God as He was then; was yesterday; is today and will be tomorrow. And most importantly, He is the same God that keeps both His promises and His covenants.

From this it follows that whatever He promised then remains valid and in force today. And of course, the Cross further reinforces this. As a result, the efficacy of the entire bible becomes part and parcel of your Christian birthright and our Christian faith.

With that in mind, and remembering that as a Gentile you are now part of the new Israel, contemplate today's Isaiah reading.

**<sup>6</sup>“This is what the Lord says—**

**Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:**

**I am the first and I am the last;**

**apart from me there is no God.**

**<sup>7</sup> Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.**

**Let him declare and lay out before me**

**what has happened since I established my ancient people,**

**and what is yet to come—**

**yes, let them foretell what will come.**

**<sup>8</sup> Do not tremble, do not be afraid.**

**Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?**

**You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?**

**No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”**

Yes, like both David and Isaiah before you, you are a witness for God.

So take heart, “do not be afraid”. Do not let our current CV19 impediment drag you down.

Rather, be both a witness and a rock that God and Jesus will be proud to support and stand next to.

**\*\*\*\*\* Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43\*\*\*\*\***

Did you notice, that as with the parable of the sower, this parable also has two segments. In the first segment (v24-30) Jesus tells the people and the disciples the parable of the weeds.

Sometime later this occurs; <sup>36</sup> **“Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”**

Like so many passages in the bible, it can take time for the murkiness to settle, like sediment in a pond, before the power and truth of what seems like a simple passage comes to fruition and hits you with maximum effect.

Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis explains the rhythm of “parable/interruption/ explanation” in this way: “Like seeds in the soil and leaven in the dough, parables need to rest in our souls for some time and grow before we can become fully conscious of their meaning”<sup>2</sup>

This parable is no different, and as Jesus sought to spend time explaining it to His disciples perhaps we should also take another look at what’s actually being said.

In last weeks Gospel text (Parable of the Sower), the focus was on the Sower and the yield of the crop that fell on good soil. This weeks parable focuses on judgment; **“<sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”** Jesus tells us how it will be. No if's, no but's. Just action by the Angels on Jesus' say so.

With this as a backdrop, it would be easy for us to jump to a conclusion and think that Jesus is saying that all evil doers, all followers of Satan, and non believers, for example, are the evil ones and they should be thrown into the fire. In our present predicament of financial strife, lock down, Covid infections and mounting job losses we might even be tempted to add some categories of society as well as individual names to this list.

But be careful. As you might have guessed this is not what Jesus is suggesting.

Professor Holly Hearon explains; “You would think that the difference between weeds and wheat would be obvious. In the parable, the slaves of the householder notice the difference right away. So why does the householder delay?

- Is it because we, the servants, are too hasty to judge which is which?
- Or because we are not in a position to judge (for example, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” [7:1])?
- Or is it to extend God's grace still longer?
- Or is it to allow us time to reflect on whether we are wheat or weeds?

In the end, says the parable, judgment does come, when the wheat and weeds are separated.

Does that make us uncomfortable or fill us with hope? Or a little of both? Justice denied can give way to a rage that burns like a furnace of fire. It can cause us to wither and cease to bear fruit. It can even lead us to become bitter enemies of one another *and of God*.

In the end, judgement is necessary and important. Not as a means of self-satisfaction; rather, as a continuing process of discernment in the here and now.”<sup>3</sup>

So best we pay attention to our own yard arm and follow David and Isaiah's lead rather than worry about how close our neighbor's toes are to the fire! Above all, have patience and wait on God's word.

#### \*\*\*\*\* Romans 8:12-25\*\*\*\*\*

This week Paul continues from where we left off last week. Next weeks reading follows on to the end of this chapter so best we prick up our ears to listen and learn from a passage that the church elders have thought to be so important.

And it is.

Today we get Paul's answers to some of the questions that I have posed in earlier Scribblings. Verse 14 tells us that to be classed as **“children of God”** we must be **“led by the spirit”**.

I love the mental picture of Jesus and the Spirit leading ... with us following; almost like Christopher Robin taking Pooh for a walk.



And v15 answers another of our questions; **“<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received *does not make you slaves*, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*””**

What excellent news. Rather than being ‘slaves’, we are members of God’s family!

Let’s now turn and take a look at Paul’s use of the word ‘flesh’ that appeared ten times in last weeks reading, and twice in this weeks.

In Greek, the words for ‘flesh’ and ‘body’ are different and have very different meanings. It would be easy to think that Paul is advocating a move out of our current bodies into some kind of spiritual plane and that he is advocating death as a way of finding life. But this is NOT the case.

What he is saying is that as humans we have a propensity to seek out and revel in the excesses of life because we are weak and human. Unfortunately, we are constantly enticed by greed, gluttony, selfishness, pride, pornography, drugs, mind numbing garbage TV and any number of other so called ‘human delights’ ... all of which are negatives, ungodly, and thereby enslave us. They trap us in the ‘flesh’ of human detritus that in turn prevents us from participating in the fullness of God’s glory, in the here and now, here on earth. God want’s us to be free from these excesses so that we can live our current human lives as His children *with the full knowledge and experience of what heaven on earth is really all about. He wants us to experience the Glory of God today, tomorrow and for the rest of our natural four score and ten.*

Hence in v13; **“<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”**

It’s that simple. If only.

Notice in v16 that Paul is referring to **“our spirit”**. That’s the portion of God that is permanently resident within you, whether you believe in God or not. And in v17, he is quite clear that **“IF we are God’s children then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ”** with the proviso that **“we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”**

Now, you would be forgiven for thinking that that almost sounds too good to be true ... apart from the ‘sufferings’ clause. So let’s take a look at the **“sufferings”** part of the equation. What does it mean? Is it achievable?

To set your mind at rest Paul is not suggesting that you seek out death by crucifixion. Neither is he suggesting that you seek out suffering of any kind. Pastor Mary Hinkle Shore explains; “The idea is not that anyone (including Christ) earns glory by suffering; rather, as Paul seeks to describe what it means to be a joint heir with Christ, he notes that the joint heir's life is characterized by the same pattern that shaped Christ's life. To be connected to Christ is to know humiliation and exaltation. To be a joint heir with Christ is share in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection”.<sup>5</sup>

Here it’s worth pointing out that Christ’s suffering takes many forms, with the Cross being just one of them. In the remaining verses Paul talks about hope and groaning of creation which is a subject big

enough to warrant an entire Phd. thesis of it's own. In a few words, let me try and pull these two (Hope and Groaning) together as its time to draw this Scribbling to a close.

**“Hope”**. It's a difficult word to describe. Wikipedia comes up with this anemic description; "Hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large. As a verb, its definitions include: "expect with confidence" and "to cherish a desire with anticipation."<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately for us, Biblical hope has a lot more going for it, and thereby us.

The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary says this; "The idea of hope as confidence in God whose goodness and mercy are to be relied on and whose promises cannot fail" is everywhere presupposed in the NT".<sup>7</sup> Which makes more sense.

But the final word goes to Bible Study Tools; "Hope leads to joy (Rom 12:12) boldness (2 Cor 3:12), and faith and love (Col 1:4-5). Hope also leads to comfort; we are to encourage one another with the knowledge of the resurrection (1 Th 4:18). Though boasting in our works is disallowed, we may boast or exult in hope of sharing God's glory (Rom 5:2; cf. Heb 3:6).

Hope has a sanctifying effect. We who look expectantly for the return of Christ, knowing that when we see him we shall become like him, purify ourselves "as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Hope also stimulates good works. Following his teaching on resurrection of the dead, Paul exhorts his readers to do the Lord's work abundantly since such "labor is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:51-58)."<sup>8</sup>

Which makes perfect sense.

**“Groaning of creation”**. Professor James Dunn explains; "Believers are being saved not *from* creation but *with* creation.... The sonship they are privileged to share in some sense with Christ, they in turn share in some sense with creation."

So as creation and humanity suffers, so should we as Christians. We are charged to love our neighbour as ourselves, to forgive, to turn the other cheek, to be charitable and thereby to suffer with Christ.

But the big question for modern Christians to grapple with is this; where do we as Christians stand in God's eyes as far as air pollution; melting ice caps; ozone depletion; plastic infused oceans; deforestation; disappearing species, etc. ... when we can not only hear and see creation groaning, but are part of the reason why creation is groaning?

Well, that's my Scribbling done for today. Your homework is to figure out what Paul means by **“the whole creation has been groaning”**, and where you stand as a Christian in relation to your answer.

**Amen**

**To finish, a short prayer of St. Francis that reflects today's readings.**

Lord Jesus, hear my prayer.

Lord, may we be instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred may we sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that we may not seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

Amen

© Roy Cooper 190720 w2534

1. All biblical passages from the NIV.
2. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis 2012. *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel according to St Matthew*. Ignatius Press. p481
3. Holly Hearon. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4511](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4511)
4. [https://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fi.pinimg.com%2F236x%2F99%2Fdd%2Ff7%2F99ddf7f4b7bcc7addc22be4cd62e49ac--pooh-winnie-christopher-robin.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinterest.com%2Fgodsgal1%2Fmckenzie-pooh-baby-shower%2F&tbid=V3u2fnys54J7KM&vet=12ahUKEwi0wabp-NHqAhVL4OAKHT4nBA8QMyghegUIARDjAQ..i&docid=ZeQpl27g\\_a3ePM&w=236&h=316&q=christopher%20robin%20taking%20pooh%20for%20a%20walk&ved=2ahUKEwi0wabp-NHqAhVL4OAKHT4nBA8QMyghegUIARDjAQ](https://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fi.pinimg.com%2F236x%2F99%2Fdd%2Ff7%2F99ddf7f4b7bcc7addc22be4cd62e49ac--pooh-winnie-christopher-robin.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pinterest.com%2Fgodsgal1%2Fmckenzie-pooh-baby-shower%2F&tbid=V3u2fnys54J7KM&vet=12ahUKEwi0wabp-NHqAhVL4OAKHT4nBA8QMyghegUIARDjAQ..i&docid=ZeQpl27g_a3ePM&w=236&h=316&q=christopher%20robin%20taking%20pooh%20for%20a%20walk&ved=2ahUKEwi0wabp-NHqAhVL4OAKHT4nBA8QMyghegUIARDjAQ)
5. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4515](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4515)
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hope>
7. Prendergast, T. (1992). [Hope \(NT\)](#). In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, pp. 282–283). New York: Doubleday
8. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/hope/>
9. Pat Robson. 2015. *A Celtic Liturgy*. SPCK. p94