

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"Wrath - but not as we know it!"

Hymn:

Reading: Romans 1. 18-23

Prayers:

One of the greatest commentaries on Romans was written by Karl Barth in the years immediately after the First World War. For him, the great question was how two of the most civilised nations in the world and especially Germany with its great traditions of culture and learning had come to be embroiled in a war that cost the lives of millions of young men and the suffering of countless women and men, girls and boys, of all ages.

If we feel that Paul is having a right rant at this point remember the suffering of the First World War and recall the harshness and the cruelty which was ever present in the Roman world. The question Paul was asking was this: "Why is this world so far removed from being the place that it potentially could be? Why are we human beings locked into patterns of life which neither benefit ourselves or society?"

Paul is, at this point, looking at the gentile world as a Jew. We should remember that later he will write of how there are many gentiles who have a stronger grasp of morality than those who are Jews. He will make clear that God's "wrath" is against both Gentiles and Jews and that God has no favourites!

But, we must try and make sense of this word "wrath" because it has a very different meaning from the way we usually use it. When someone is wrathful he is angry almost beyond measure and there is at least a suggestion that they are in danger of acting in an unrestrained way. When Paul speaks about God's "wrath" he is using a technical term for God's active opposition to all that is wrong.

In many ways God's "wrath" is impersonal. He has set us in a world where if we act in ways that are opposed to God and to what he wants of us, there are dire consequences.

It's a bit like saying that if we put our hand in the fire we get burnt. God doesn't have a grudge against us. It's just the way the world is. I suspect though that we should remember that God feels for those who are hurt by the wrong-doing of others and has a righteous anger against what causes his children to suffer.

Paul believes that everyone has a sense that creation is a gift of the Creator. It is when people take the creation for granted and use it for their own selfish ends, without thought for what their creator might want of them that their lives and life of the world spirals downwards.

Sin breeds more sin.

We live in a world which is, in some ways, very different from Paul's. I wonder whether we believe it is true in our western world that everybody grows up with a sense that there is a God and that we ought to give him thanks for his creation and honour him in the way we treat both his creation in general and each other?

I would be interested to know what you think!

I don't know, but it does seem to me that when Paul says that "Claiming to be wise, they became fools" we have plenty of examples of just that. Human wisdom has got the western world in a most enormous economic mess. We thought we could have whatever we wanted. The wise people said we could borrow without anxiety about the future consequences. Yesterday, we discovered that there is a cost.

I suspect that some of those who speak with such assurance about the cost free nature of sexual relationships which are devoid of love and commitment are also being proved to be fools in our society where there is much unhappiness and loneliness.

Paul asks us to look not just at our sexual relationships but at the whole way in which we think and speak and act towards those with whom we share this world.

Yes, he uses a broad brush but is he right in suggesting that there is something fundamentally wrong with the way we live together in this world?

If he's wrong we still have the challenge of two World Wars and their terrible consequences to remember and account for!

Amen.

