

TUESDAY COMMUNION

“An acceptable life”

Hymn: 457 Christ who glory fills the skies

Reading: Romans 2.12-16

Prayers:

It is one of the dangers facing religious people of whatever faith that they can come to believe themselves superior to everyone else because they possess “the truth”.

I have heard Christians confidently predicting that only those who accept their particular brand of Christianity have any hope of being found acceptable to God on the day of judgement. Everyone else will be condemned to eternal separation!

Well, there were those amongst the Jews of Paul’s time who were confident that because they had “the Law”, the writings which expressed God’s will that they were both uniquely blessed. They would discuss the law and take a great interest in how it should be interpreted even with regard to the smallest details of daily life. They were confident that their concern for the law would give them a privileged place on the day of judgement. Gentiles, those outside the law, didn’t stand a chance!

Paul hasn’t yet arrived at the heart of what he wants to say. He’s still talking in general terms and hasn’t yet come to what will be his profound thoughts on our human condition and human possibilities in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus....

I think he’s really exploring what it means to live a life that is acceptable to God..... There is more to be said than this but this is an important point at which to start.

Who is acceptable to God?

Paul says it’s not those Jews who talk endlessly about the law but those actually seek to live their lives in accordance with what they believe, in the light of the law, God wants of them. Paul describes them as “the doers of the law” and I don’t get the impression that he’s saying that these people are getting it perfectly right.

What they are seeking to do is to get on with living in the way that God wants! What is really surprising is that Paul, a Jew himself, should also speak of how the Gentiles are capable of instinctively doing what the law requires.

He says, ***“they show that what the law requires- is written on their hearts.”***

Again, he isn’t saying they live perfect lives but that by their concern to live good lives they are acceptable to God. We live in a country which has developed a code of law which is not perfect but which has much to commend it and there was in Roman law, also, that which was good and for the benefit of the whole community.

There is also the way in which people's consciences are shaped so that, at their best, they come to have an instinct about what is just and right.....

Though Paul was a Jew, he grew up in the Greek world with its great philosophers who were also people who sought to live good lives. He was aware of those who lived lives that were of a high standard by any criteria. We, too, know such people and give thanks for them.

Yet, Paul declares also that at the end there is judgement and it's a judgement not only on what is public knowledge but also on the "secret thoughts of all."

We will have to face up to the whole truth both about our own lives and about the consequences of all that we have been for our families, our communities and our world. There will be no hiding place!

Maybe at this point Paul's readers were beginning to think who can stand before such soul-searching!

That will be the question which lies at the heart of this letter to the Romans.....

For now, it is perhaps just important to note that Paul speaks of the judgement of God being given "through Jesus". We remember that the life of Jesus revealed a God whose great desire is to draw all people to himself.

God is love and he has no wish to exclude people but, rather, to draw them into fellowship. It is people, and often those who are most convinced of their own righteousness, who choose to exclude themselves from the love and forgiveness that is offered them.

Surely, here is both a blessing in the generosity of God and a warning lest we turn our backs on it!

Amen