

TUESDAY COMMUNION

“Sin & Grace”

Hymn: 134. Forgive our sins as we forgive.....

Reading: Romans 3.22(b)-26

Prayers:

Perhaps all of us have words from the Bible which have stuck in our minds and shape our understanding.

For me, one of those of those phrases is from our reading:

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

Why?

First, it's a constant reminder to me that I and the entire human race share in the same condition. None of us are the people that God wants us to be. From the greatest sage to the man incarcerated in prison for the most terrible crimes, we are all people who have fallen short of the glory of God.

Secondly, it speaks of that “glory” which is the nature of God and which he longs to see reflected in humankind. The other Sunday we had a “Songs of Praise” and one of the hymns that was chosen was “Jerusalem”, the setting of William Blake's great poem. It's a song about which there is much debate and some bishops say it ought to be banned!

For myself, it seems to me that Blake is protesting against all the ways in which we blot out the glory of God by what we create and by the way we treat people. His “dark satanic mills” with their human beings, young and old, made to work long hours in strict boring routines within those vast industrial factories take from their workers the “glory” that ought to be theirs.

What speaks to us of the loss of glory?

- the young woman terribly injured in a NATO air attack in Afghanistan,
- the young man's face already aged and stressed as he injects himself.
- the family torn apart by arguments over a will.
- the estate which is depressing to look at and worse to live on.
- the church turning its back on its community.
- my own failure to think and speak and act as I ought, quite independently of whether or not I keep “the rules”. I mar the glory of God which is love and joy and peace, creativity and the building up of what is good and true self-giving and generosity.

Of course, we do see and hear glimpses of “glory”. In a way that is what is so tantalising. We do know that there is something better and yet we seem to be incapable of achieving it either in our society or in ourselves.

So, if Paul is right, that we are locked into a situation where we can’t achieve that “glory” God wants of us, if, in a sense, we are helpless, what hope is there?

Our reading is not an easy one, a long and rather tortuous sentence but it contains this gem which declares we are put right with God “by grace as a gift”. “Grace” comes from outside the world of law. It’s a gift which isn’t earned by how good we’ve been but comes to us entirely as a gift of God.

Grace is what God offers us quiet independently of whatever we may have deserved. For Paul the way to that life God wants for us is by accepting what he wish to give us rather than by what we think we can achieve. It is about accepting his love for each one of us which gives value to our own lives and changes the way in which we view the lives of others.

It’s about accepting the mercy of God, his forgiveness of all that has made us less than we might have been. It’s about accepting the possibility that through the grace of God and not by our own effort we can become all that God wants us to be.

We are “work in progress”!

So, what is it that enables us both to glimpse that “grace” does exist and isn’t just a figment of our wishful thinking?

For Paul, the sign of grace and the promise of grace is “in Jesus Christ” who he describes as “a sacrifice of atonement”. Not only in his death but through his whole life he comes in the name of God,

- reaching out to women and men in all their need,
- opening up new possibilities,
- demonstrating by word and deed the height and depth of God’s love for them.

“Faith” is accepting what is offered to us human beings who can’t become “glorious”, whole and complete, by our own effort!

Only by “grace”, freely offered, can we become all that God wants us to be!

Amen