

## TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn:

Reading: Romans 3.27 – 4.5

Prayers:

**Two of the great religious questions are these:  
“Who are the people who matter to God?”  
and “How can human beings be at one with God”.**

In different ways, through the centuries certain groups of religious people have come to think that they alone are acceptable to God. There's the wonderful story about the Starkadders and the farmer turned preacher whose great message is: “You're all doomed!” Only he and a tiny handful of righteous people had any hope!

I also recall visiting a monastery in Slovenia and in a wonderful piece of plasterwork the catholic faithful were making their way towards the bliss of heaven whilst a great Protestant reformer and his followers were approaching the gaping jaws of hell.

As for people of other faith: Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Buddhist some Christians have already consigned them to the devil!

**Paul, though, asks the rhetorical question:  
*Is God the God of the Jews only?*  
believing that the true answer is a resounding, “No”.  
He is the God of the whole creation and of all people.**

The question then is, “How can very different people be at one with God?” This was the sharp question which lay at the root of the great fifteenth century Reformation in Europe. The Catholic Church five hundred years ago (in many ways different from today's Catholic Church) offered women and men an assured way to be with God and to share in the blessedness of heaven.

At its worst, (and often it wasn't) this became a system of “You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.” A person could say, “For my part, I'll attend mass or pay for masses to be said, I'll buy relics or the, so-called, “Papal indulgences”. In return for what they'd done, the same person would expect God to do them the favour of giving them an easy time when they died and provide them with a short-cut to the delights of heaven.

This was a rather mercenary deal or a bargain. Human beings did certain good works and, in return, God gave them what they wanted. That may be a rather crude caricature but time and again we still hear people talking in ways that are not a million miles from this.

Paul likens this kind of a deal to a world in which we agree to do certain work in return for a clearly defined amount of pay in return. By contrast, Paul remembers the story of Abraham and how he trusted in God as he set out on a journey not knowing where he was going.

Later, he dared to believe that God would fulfil the promise that he would be the father of many nations, despite having no children at that time Abraham simply trusted God and the Bible story declares that this trust was “reckoned to him as righteousness”.

Abraham was accepted by God not on the basis of some kind of deal or bargain nor because he was a morally perfect man. He was accepted because he trusted God. The righteous God accepted Abraham and treated him as the “righteous”, good and acceptable man because of his faith.

Faith enables us to be open to the God who sees all the potential within our lives and all that we may become. He knows where “faith” can lead and the people we can become. In other words, we are accepted not just for who we are now but for the people who, by faith, we can become!

In some ways, we Christians live on a knife edge because we recognise that “faith” and “trust” are not something we can control. Trust in God isn’t confined to our group or even the Christian religion.

Sometimes, when I have been with atheists it seems to me that they have a profound trust and hope in values which seem to me to come from beyond a purely a rational analysis of what is good. They might not like me saying it, but I suspect they, too, are people of faith.

God knows where faith is to be found and it’s utterly beyond our ability to quantify or control it!

We Christians are not in control of “faith” and should never attempt to be! We simply give thanks to God for giving us this gift of faith and that, for us, it is the person of Jesus who enables us to trust in his infinite grace, the grace which reaches out to all humankind.

Amen.