

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"Living in the New Age"

Hymn: 696 (omit verse 3.) Jesus, thy boundless love to me.

Reading: Romans 5.6 – 5.11

Prayers:

Often we like to divide the human race into those who are “weak” and those who are “strong”, those who are “sinners” and those who are “virtuous”.

Paul puts a massive question-mark against this way of thinking. Paul speaks about the whole human race as “weak” because we know the truth neither about ourselves or God. He speaks about us all being “sinners” in our natural state, incapable of being all that God wants us to be.

But is he right?

Are we, as individuals and as a society incapable of using our ability to become all that God wants it to be? I suspect that’s a statement that would be challenged by many people.

We often like to think that if only we had better politicians, if only we were less greedy, if only we had a better educational system that we could become a perfect society with perfect people!

It was part of the appeal of Hitler and the Nazis that they had it within their own strength to create the ideal society. Of course, in the process they had to be rid of vast swathes of German society: Jews, malcontents, those with disability, those who were gay.

Well Paul is convinced that “sin” represents not so much our oft-revealed capacity for doing what is wrong but our total inability to become all that God wants us to be: either as individuals or as a society.

As we have seen before, human sin results in God’s “wrath”. This isn’t his anger with human beings but the almost impersonal way in which human folly, our sinfulness leads to terrible consequences.

We need look no further than the outcome of Fascism! As King Lear looked at the trouble in the world he railed against a God sitting far removed from the world, swatting human beings as a schoolboy swats flies! Such a God laughs at our futility and destroys us for his sport.

Paul sees God quite different for he sees him in Jesus. He is the God who has always cared for the human race and who reveals his love for us at the right time by coming to be with us in Jesus. For us Jesus lives and for us Jesus sheds his blood. He gives his whole life for people who live under the power of sin, the power

that prevents us all from creating the kind of perfect lives and perfect society God wants.

As Paul writes:

“God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

There is a sense of two ages in what Paul says in this passage. There is the old age in the past when people were unaware of the love God had not only for themselves but for the whole human race.

It was the age when people sometimes thought that by keeping the rules and regulations they had become all that God wanted them to be. It was a time of ignorance about God and about themselves.....

With the coming of Christ a new age has dawned. It's an age in which God has revealed that in love he reaches out to the whole human race to draw them into fellowship with himself. He has reconciled us to himself and the result is that we are "saved".

I remember hearing the story of Anglican bishop being asked whether he was saved.

He replied with another question:

“Do you mean past, present or future?”

We find all three meanings in the New Testament. By God's grace, many people have known in the past that they have been drawn into fellowship with a God who loves them and forgives them.

Many know that in the present, for all their limitations, he is at work in them and through them, changing and reshaping the way they think and speak and act.

We hope that beyond this life we shall become, through his life-transforming love and power, all that he wants us to become.

We shall, in the language of the Wesley's, be saved to the uttermost!

Christians have the privilege of living in this new age in which "sin", though still present in our lives, no longer dominates our existence.

The love of God in Jesus has brought us into fellowship with our Creator and through him we shall one day be perfect, a community saved by the grace revealed in Christ, crucified and risen.

Amen.