

REFLECTION for the 12th Sunday of Trinity 30th August 2020

Readings: Romans 12:9-end; Matthew 16:21-end

‘Get behind me, Satan!’ Surely this is the sternest rebuke to anyone in the whole Gospel, and to Peter of all people.

After all in last week’s reading we heard that when Jesus asked his disciples who do people say the Son of Man is it was Simon Peter who answered ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’.

Jesus then answered him saying Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Yet now Peter is being treated as a personification of evil. Why should this be? If we delve deeper. ‘Get behind me’ is the same verb used elsewhere for ‘follow’.

So, this is not just a rebuke; it is also a call to follow. Follow in the path of Jesus rather than the way of the world. To set his mind on divine things not on human things.

If we now want to follow Jesus and want to know what setting our mind on divine things means we could not do much better than to read the Epistle that we have been given today.

Now God knows that we are not perfect and I for one fail in so many ways to do the right thing at the right time. Indulging in human pleasures and distractions when I should be doing more profitable things for God. But a blueprint of guidance that we are given in Romans is a good reminder to point me in the right direction.

It outlines what we should be doing and the advice comes thick and fast. So fast that is so easy to read it quickly and for no more than an idea of what is being said to stick in our minds.

So let us for a moment take each statement and think about it.

Let love be genuine – We must be sincere in showing our love to one another. This doesn't mean gushing love or a false love to those that we don't really like. But a real open love and understanding for all.

Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good – We must be able to discern good and evil. Even if we are called to love we must not ignore or condone evil acts. And we must hold fast to what we believe is good even if it goes against the grain of what is believed by others or society in general. It is not always easy to stand up for what is right, especially in these days when people are shouted down on social media if their views don't accord with the mainstream.

Love one another with mutual affection – This is like family love. To love other Christians as if they were in your own family.

Giving time to others, listening to them to hear what they are really saying, not being judgemental and being concerned for their wellbeing.

Outdo one another in showing honour – whilst not putting yourself down, think of others being better than yourself and show them respect. It can be easy to respect those who are powerful and have status in society. But not so easy when the person has no status. These are often important people in keeping society going as we have seen with the key workers and how they have served us during lockdown.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit in serving the Lord. Be an enthusiastic follower without being fanatical. After all sometimes the fanatical put people off the very thing they are promoting. There is no need to be a perfectionist and certainly no need to criticise anyone who don't think is up to our

standard. But have a faith that shows as a glow for the Holy Spirit or even a bubbling over of spiritual zeal. Remembering that this is not to be self-serving but in order that we might serve God.

Verse twelve is packed with three statements; Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer – Though we should be thankful for the hope that we have that we are doing God's will and the hope in the second coming but meanwhile there will be times when that hope is challenged by the troubles of the world. That can be especially true when we or those near us suffer and as a nation we are going through a time of suffering in so many ways, physically, mentally and spiritually. We are being advised to be patient during a time of suffering and always bring our hopes and needs to God in prayer. Prayer is so important. Sometimes we might find prayer easy as we talk to God and at other times it might seem a struggle as we don't feel we are being listened to. But we must believe that God is listening and through our perseverance in prayer we will get answers.

Next we have contribute to the needs of the saints – Where we see that there is a need and feel that God is guiding us to meet that need, whether it be financial or other resources that are required we should give and we should do it with a generous heart.

Extend hospitality to strangers – To visitors whether known or not known to you, hospitality is an indispensable expression of love. Paul was urging Romans not just to practise hospitality but to positively pursue it. Enquire after and look carefully for strangers and meet their needs.

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them – As Jesus said to his disciples that they should bless those who curse us and even pray for them and do good to them.

Sometimes that can lead to the turning around of the hardest of hearts. Certainly not an easy thing to do but we should demonstrate good will to all people.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep – We should be known as people who will come alongside their neighbour in times of both celebration and joy but also at moments of sadness where sympathy is needed. This can be easy at a time of happiness but a challenge to come near people at difficult times. Not knowing what to say and how you will be received. Yet so often it is just your presence, your showing concern that is what is needed.

Live in harmony with one another – Having a common mind with our fellow Christians so that we can work effectively together in God's work. That must be especially true as we work as a United Benefice to serve the people of West Wickham and the surrounding areas.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly, do not claim to be wiser than you are – We should show a bit of humility and not be proud or snobbish and not condescending. It's not a question of status for we are all children of God.

The final verses are about our relationship with our enemies. We have already had do not curse. We then have the other strong negatives:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil but live at peaceably with all,
Never avenge yourselves but leave room for the wrath of God
and

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

It is all too easy to want to curse someone who wrongs you or even persecutes you and it is natural to want to retaliate in the heat of the moment and even wanting to do something evil to someone in return for an evil. Or we may want to gain revenge

in some way. But we are told to leave that to God who sees all and knows all.

And although it seems strange and is difficult, where there has been evil a good act can change the situation and may make someone change their ways.

What all these pieces of advice have been doing is showing us how we can help to bring God's love into our world.

As Hazel said last week 'If we are really part of the church, built on the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah we do need to free ourselves from the ways of this world and allow our identity in Christ to drive our behaviours – in our own lives and in our community'.

Amen