

Baptism sermon Romans 5 1-8

Last week we looked at the most famous passage in the bible – John 3:16- God so loved the world etc. And today (as well as Jesus meeting another person who Jesus encounters, very different to Nicodemus, but with the same need to discover who Jesus is and God's love) we take a diversion away from John's gospel to our (first) reading Romans 5:1-12. Did you notice how it started? therefore! In other words – here you go, here's your answer, here's my summary – I make quite a few cakes – I enjoy following recipes – they often start with a list of ingredients, then how to make the cake – but the most important part – eating them! That's what Paul is doing so far in his letter to the first Christians in Rome. He's given them a list of ingredients- in his case a summary of the human condition, then the method – what Jesus Christ has done by living, dying on a cross and rising to new life – (some of the ingredients and method present in Harper's baptism service today) and now he's sharing the cake with them – this is the result!

Romans 5:1 since we are put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ – that's God's promise for you, (that's God's promise today for Harper)

Peace – it's fair to say we live in troubled times – people are worried, maybe even losing sleep, worried for themselves, worried for their friends and family, maybe worried about loss of job, security, fear of isolation.

Let's not make the mistake, though, in thinking that the peace that Jesus gives means we can be free from troubles, or it's a passive acceptance of the way things are. No – (Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, fight valiantly against sin, the world and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life) – Peace with God through Jesus Christ is an active peace. You don't have to be an Old Testament prophet to recognise that there are literally hundreds of things that need changing – both great and small.

We're not supposed to have peace where there are situations of outright injustice...We're not called to remain silent while the weak go the wall, while the rich oppress the poor or while children starve

We are supposed to be filled with a deep disquiet that such things can be and to do all in our power to challenge and to change...but beneath that, there should remain the constant reassurance that our ultimate destiny is secure for Jesus has already done all that is needful.

Julian of Norwich, writing in the 14th century, understood this when she shared her vision of God's ultimate certainty

“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well”

She wasn't skirting round the realities of life – indeed, she preceded these words with a recognition that “evil is inevitable” – but she was able to see where we are all heading...to know that despite all there is to engender grief and desperation, we can continue to hope.

Indeed, hope is, mysteriously, a direct fruit of the trials of life. Living in a relationship with Jesus Christ (the relationship that Harper begins today) brings the realities of life into perspective. If we're honest we know that one way or another life will bring its share of suffering (much though we may hate to consider that today as we bring Harper to be baptised) Within this passage of scripture what we see is the way that God is able to take suffering and redeem it, make something good from it. Another slice of the cake... Suffering brings endurance, character and hope in God's hands.

Without God, we're likely to respond to suffering with indignation, brokenness, bitterness and despair...but the secret ingredient, a relationship with Jesus Christ, changes everything.

Paul is so certain that this is indisputable...he uses the language of the law, of provable facts to present his case.

God wants to prove his love for us. (and today Harper is our visual aid of that love. In a few moments, I will trace the sign of the cross on her forehead. . this is an invisible label, establishing beyond dispute just who we belong to....From our baptism onwards, we belong to God; and as adults we are called to say 'yes' to that love, just as Harper's parents and godparents will say that yes in the words of promise and commitments soon.

That invisible sign isn't any sign, it's the sign of the cross. Jesus's open arms were a hug that encompasses the whole of the world and everyone who has ever lived in it.... Remember that favourite verse John 3:16 from last week- God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will have eternal life. If you don't know that truth for yourself yet, why not let today be the day you say yes to God in Jesus?

Whenever we see a cross, see it as a sign of just how much God loves you, Harper, Emily, Sam...

We all know that there is nothing like being loved to inspire us to love in return....and when we see Christ on the cross, it reminds us just how loved and loveable we are to God...which inspires us to love in return.

In the words of Paul in our bible reading "God's love poured into our hearts..." God's love changes everything...God's love shown in the waters of baptism.

When I was a curate, I baptised a toddler named Dylan.

(Now, I'll only use a small amount of water to baptise Harper, but the word baptise means to completely cover, immerse in, overwhelm with. But not water, but God – his love poured out through the person of the Holy Spirit -the life of God poured over her.

When I poured the first polite trickle over his head, he began to suspect that I didn't actually

If the waters of baptism represent God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, then that is in no way a retrained, polite, church of England dribble

Rather it's a torrent...something overwhelming that can flood every corner, sweep us off our feet, change the whole landscape of our lives forever.

(woman at the well)

That overwhelming tide doesn't depend on our love for God. It doesn't depend on our response [(though the baptism service represents the very first step in a life time of response to God's love, and as mature adults we do need to respond)

God won't love Harper more when we've brought her to Baptism and declared her formally part of God's family...He already loves her completely and totally, as if she was the only baby there had ever been for God to love.

Actually, that's how God feels about you too – just pause and hear that again.

There's nothing the world you can do to make God love you more, or to make God love you less. God just loves you, because that's what and who God is. God is love.

But God calls us, calls you, to respond...

...We are called, invited, to respond of course...to live lives so full of love that we ourselves, with all our doubts, all our imperfections, all our uncertainties, can become Good News for our world...Good news of the God who loves us.

So God offers us peace – peace with himself not because of what I have done, or what you have done, or even what Harper has done, but because that’s just how God is.

I know I need that peace in troubled times – and if you’re honest, you know you need that peace too. That can be mine, that can be yours,(that can be Harpers – all we need to do is to say ‘yes’ to God, as Harper’s parents Emily and Sam, and her Godparents (....) will do right now.