

July 5th

Romans 7. 15-25a

15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

"I do not understand my own actions.... for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

To do what we do not want to do is insanity. Madness.

Sin is a madness. We find goodness to be compelling yet we choose to act otherwise. Evil actions are a kind of madness.

Why is it that some people do not take social distancing seriously?

Why has wearing a mask, which prevents us infecting others, has become in some places a political act?

Why do people crowd onto beaches, leaving litter and worse behind? Madness

People find goodness compelling but many choose to act otherwise.

In the stories of Jesus involve him healing people. And another sign of the Kingdom is Jesus casting out evil spirits. He came to heal us of our sin, our madness.

Jesus struggled with crowds. Crowds were even more fickle than individuals.

At the start of Holy Week the crowd welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. "Hosanna to the King" they cried.

During Jesus' trial, later in the week, the crowd was mad. And its chanting was madness. "Crucify him! Save Barabbas !" they shouted.

When we are in a crowd, it is easiest to go with the crowd.

There, we do what we don't want to do, because we are carried along by madness of the crowd.

It takes courage and a good mind to face up to sin.

When facing up to sin we often have to walk in the opposite direction to everyone else's collective madness.

Paul tells us the way of sin is death.

To sin is not to trust God.

We lose our relationship with God, who is the source of life, when we do the wrong thing.

The good news is that God has not lost his relationship with the sinner.

God rescues us from our malady in Jesus Christ.

But we have work to do as well. The question is "who do we desire? To whom do we go?"

Let me explain:

In the story of the prodigal son, the son was caught up in a madness. His desires told him he wanted life outside his father's love. So he treated his father as dead. He took his inheritance. And off he went to spend it.

He had to lose his inheritance, on a spending spree, he had to lose his life to find it.

When life was rock bottom. The prodigal came to his senses. The question is "who does he desire? To whom can he go?"

Having wasted and exhausted his desires in a foreign place in a fit of madness, the prodigal son came to his senses.

The answer to the big question was life was much better with his father. So he went home.

When he met his father, the prodigal pretty much said "I do not understand my own actions... for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do... let me be your hired hand".

St Augustine describes this process of repentance as a "coming home to ourselves".

Although we were not aware of it, and the prodigal son in the foreign land was not aware of it, God is with us in all our foolishness; God knows we have strayed from ourselves, when we sin.

Reflect on the words of the Anglican BCP Collect for Peace:

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God's service is perfect freedom. The prodigal who had strayed from himself as much as from his father, now returns, not as a hired servant, but as the father's son, in whose service is perfect freedom.

Ponder. Think. Reflect. Come to your senses.

What do you desire?

Do you desire sin, which St Paul suggests is madness and slavery.

Or to come home?

Back to the father's home, where we are not divided, where we are one with our self?

Let's return to God. Repent. We return to our true self.

Viewed from the perspective of eternity coming home to the father is a done deal.

We have been rescued from the body of death through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Viewed within time, there is a transformation to undergo in each one of us.

The question lies ever before us: What do we desire?

We have to educate our desires. Let me explain with a current analogy.

A sinful young person might not think social distancing and washing one's hands and wearing a mask is important.

Perhaps this thought is a madness. Perhaps this thought is a political statement. Perhaps he does not desire to do what he is told, even by God. So the young man mixes with the crowd.

Then their best friend catches the coronavirus and becomes really ill.

The young person comes to his senses. He repents of his madness.

He no longer desires total freedom becomes he realises sin leads to death.

His desires are educated. He starts to reflect on the guidelines given for the common good.

Or lets reflect on our desires in a positive way.

During these three months of crisis, many people have learnt that home is a good place to be.

During these last three months many have come to appreciate that a home/work balance should be weighted in favour of home. It is a positive thing emotionally.

What matters? What do we desire? On reflection...

- family matters more than making money
- one's health and the environment matters more than we consume

What matters?

- Our neighbours do.
- Our nursing homes do.
- The bus driver does.
- The person from overseas in our health service truly matters.

All of us, Christians too, can be taught by the law of God, what matters. But our desires still need an education.

Paul puts it this way (v22 & 23):

I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

The answer as to who will education our desires, is found in chapter 8. The Holy Spirit teaches us.

Many children today, after three months at home, have to catch up in their education. Over the summer, the lucky ones will find a mentor, a personal trainer to help with the catch up.

The Holy Spirit educates our desires. He is our personal trainer. He helps us catch up in God's ways.

George Herbert in a poem called 'Elixir' wrote this:

*Teach me, my God and King,
in all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
to do it as for Thee....*

And Herbert went on to say:

*All may of Thee partake:
nothing can be so mean,
which with his tincture—"for Thy sake"—
will not grow bright and clean.*

Picture a butler whose desire it is for the whole house to run just as the master desires. Now the job of the butler takes *years* to learn. It is an education.

And a fellow servant learns how to become a butler by watching the butler at his task.

Multiple practices have to be learnt:

Cleaning and polishing,
planning and ordering,
encouraging and advising the rest of the household.

As Herbert puts it, every tincture is "for thy sake", for the master's sake.

In God's household, God's service is perfect freedom. It is great learning to be a butler, to serve in God's household.

Who is God's butler?

The Holy Spirit is God's butler.

The head butler, the Holy Spirit, teaching us how to do all things, 'every tincture', for the master.

Who is the master? He is:

- The God who gives us life.
- The God who rescues us from the slavery of sin.
- The God who teaches us what really matters in life.
- The God in whom all madness of sin is healed,
and in whom, we do what we *want* to do, for we do it "all for thee".