

Bible readings

Psalm 145:1-12

- 145 I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
- ² Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.
- ³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.
- ⁴ One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
- ⁵ On the glorious splendour of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
- ⁶ They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.
- ⁷ They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
- ⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.
- ¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you!
- ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,
- ¹² to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.

Romans 6:16-23

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sermon

My yoke is easy and my burden is light

Last week we had two national events happening on the one day. The marking of 75 years of the National Health Service, a celebration which at the same time put into sharp focus the question if it can survive to 100 years.

And the event in Edinburgh, in St Giles' Church where King Charles received the Scottish crown jewels, celebrated by many and at the same time protested against, with loud voices.

Wherever you stand, this morning you hear the King of kings; the voice of our humble Lord Jesus Christ,

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

We know that life is not easy.

So, if these words of Jesus do not mean that as long as you follow Jesus, life goes smoothly, without struggles, what then do these words mean?

The Apostle Paul may help. In his own way, he presents sin, leading to death and obedience, leading to righteousness.

Paul personifies the two opposing powers. He puts sin over against God. You can present yourself to either. The choice to serve sin results in death. The choice to serve God means eternal life through the Risen Lord.

Now, Paul uses the image of slaves, which is a status we cannot identify with. But if you remember the story of Moses at the burning bush, in the book of Exodus, you remember that Moses was called by God to lead Israel out of slavery. Moses was set apart by God, to carry out this mission impossible. He was told by God to set Israel free from the authority of Pharaoh. This meant leaving behind a life as slave; and entering a new life under the authority of God.

Yet, the meaning of living under the authority of God, had to be learned by Israel. Israel had to learn to trust Him; learn to discover that He cared and how He cared for them, during the forty years in the desert.

Hence, the wandering in the desert was training, given by God, in His mysterious ways.

Paul was a Pharisee whose heart and mind were shaped by God's story with Israel. Paul was a deeply passionate Jew. He was an expert of the Torah; of the commandments that God gave Israel at Mount Sinai. Paul served God through his obedience to God's law. But... it was obedience that lacked love, whereas God's love was why the commandments were given in the first place. God gave the commandments to set boundaries. Crossing lines results in harming one another. And that is what God did not, does not and will never want.

Just as Israel had to learn to get to know God, so Paul had to learn to get to know God: God as love. It was not until Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, that Paul could

see God as love, in Christ. And from then he no longer used his legs to go after followers of Christ. He no longer used his hands to kill them. When he saw God as love in Christ, Paul changed. He made himself fully available to be used by God to draw people into the light of the love that captured him.

When hands, feet and eyes function within that light, they become instruments of God. As Paul says, then sin will have no dominion over you. Grace will have dominion over you.

And so, through grace only, new life has been given to us, freely. Within the light of Christ's grace, God creates new beginnings, including new church life, which always remains rooted in God Himself. Paul puts into sharp focus the heart of church life: God Himself. From worshipping Him, all the other aspects of church life emerge.

However, new life comes with letting go the things you do not want to let go. If you are honest, you know yourself best what those things are. That is something between you and God.

Do you know what the meaning of the Hebrew word of sin is: missing the purpose. That is of course, missing God's purpose.

Paul missed God's purpose as long as he was a zealous Pharisee, until he was struck by lightning, which caused his physical blindness. In this blinding light, Jesus revealed Himself to Paul; intervened in Paul's life, so that Paul would no longer miss God's purpose. Paul was physically blind for three days. During those three days of blindness, he began to see what he had missed.

By using the image of master and slave, Paul proclaims your identity in Christ, which leads to eternal life:

I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. (Romans 6:19)

There is familiarity with the image of Christ's body of which we are members. Each member being equally important in its functioning. Here, Paul refers to the members of the human body, which are to be used to serve the Lord who came from heaven to serve. Hands can be used to destroy and to build. Feet can be used to kick someone or to walk with someone. Words that come from our mouth can hurt or comfort. What they do depends on whether or not we let Christ reign over us.

We heard the words from the Psalmist, proclaiming the greatness of God who is the King of kings:

*I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.
² Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.
³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:1-12)*

Do we dare join the Psalmist in the midst of all the pressures, uncertainties and questions for which nobody has answers? Do we dare commit ourselves to God and let Him be who He is, in all His mysterious ways, without protesting?

*The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
⁹ The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made. (Psalm 145:8-9)*

These words take us back to God and Moses. God had first presented Himself to Moses at the burning bush. There He gave His name: 'I am who I am.' Later in the desert, after the Golden Calf incident, God gave the meaning of His Name: I am who I am, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

This is the One whom we worship. The Holy One who revealed Himself through Jesus in humility and vulnerability.

There was a young boy, the grandson of a Rabbi, playing with his friends. Playing hide and seek. He found such a good hiding place. He was excited for the moment he would be found. He waited and waited. Waited and waited....Nobody came. Then he went looking for his friends. They were nowhere to be seen. In tears, he went to his granddad, who wiped his grandson's tears and said: 'My boy, this is how God feels. When He, sometimes hides, hoping that people would look for Him, and then realizing that nobody did.'

Do not be one of those people. Look for the Lord, whatever your circumstances are. Seek Him, always.

Amen