

## **9<sup>th</sup> After Trinity 2011**

**+ For many people the week just gone has been memorable for many different reasons. All of us must have felt the relief of life returning to normal after the disturbances of two weeks ago. For many families recent days will have seen the excitements, joys and sorrows of exam results coming through.**

**One way or another it will feel as though our efforts have helped to make a change in our own lives and the lives of those around us – and that will be absolutely right.**

**It all serves to highlight a strange tension that exists between our “normal” everyday lives and our lives as Christians.**

**Now we know that in fact I’m the last person to seem to be making a distinction between one bit of life and another! Surely the two are beautifully integrated. Our faith embraces our lives in the world God made and we bring**

**every part of that life and that world here as we worship the God of it all.**

**We bring our concern for and love of the world here and we bring all our God-given gifts, too. And what a wonderful range of gifts it is. Each one of us is gifted in some different way to fulfill a role in the world and in the Church. Paul, in his letter to the church in Rome, celebrates this variety of gifts and so he should and so should we.**

**But Paul is saying something else to the Church. See the way he pleads for his readers to surrender themselves to God. Elsewhere in this letter he has been pointing out the problems and pitfalls of the Law – the old system that used to govern God’s people – and contrasting the rule of the Law with the new life of faith in Christ.**

**The Law, he has said, has two huge problems. First it creates sin and failure and people endlessly get caught in its details and convolutions. Second it can actually get in**

**God's way or replace God as people mistake the Law for God and think that somehow the Law is bigger than God's love. Worse, it leads people to think that salvation, through the Law, can be achieved by hard work and individual energy and virtue – so leaving us two big steps away from God. Placing God beyond the law and our own cleverness or goodness.**

**“Please”, Paul is saying, “just give yourself into God's love and everything else will fall into place.” Trust God's love as we see it in Christ and that is all you will ever need.**

**Forget trying to be more obedient to the Law than your neighbours or cleverer or more virtuous and instead see God as he is and let all that is good flow from that. The Christian faith isn't an assault course and it isn't a competition.**

**Would your partner, your husband or wife be forever proving his or her love for you by**

**challenging you or testing you or making your life difficult?**

**Isn't a loving relationship characterized by mutual self-giving and unconditional love? Why should our relationship with God be any tougher? It was God who started it and wanted this relationship in the first place after all.**

**Let God's love transform you, says Paul, so that you can recognise God's will and God's love at work.**

**Paul says all that and he didn't even have the advantage that we have enjoyed this morning of reading Matthew's Gospel.**

**But look at Peter's encounter with Jesus. It ends with Jesus' promised to build the Church on the rock that is Peter. What precisely Jesus meant by such a statement we could discuss from now 'til Christmas but it's a big thing to say. But what has Peter done to warrant such affirmation from Jesus. He has**

**said: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” That’s all and yet what more can anyone say?**

**The disciples have already reported what other people are saying about Jesus but when Jesus turns the tables and asks what *they* think it is Peter who gets it right. Peter says the necessary truth.**

**It isn’t enough to say that Jesus is good or clever or moral or like the prophets of old. What must be said is what defines the uniqueness of Jesus and, for that matter, what still makes Christianity outrageously different from Judaism and Islam.**

**Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**

**How many degrees in theology do you need to say that? How terribly virtuous do you need to be in order to recognise that? How much effort on our part does it take to match Peter’s qualification to be the foundation of the Church?**

**Peter, and we like him, has recognised the heart of the matter. He has recognised the truth about God and Jesus’ part in God’s plan. Remember how a couple of weeks ago we were talking about the ability to see the truth about ourselves and about God? Well here is Peter getting that bit right.**

**This is what Paul is asking the church in Rome to do and it’s what we are called upon to do. Want more? Want more morality – a new set of commandments and laws? We can want that until we are blue in the face but it isn’t what God wants of his Church.**

**He asks us to trust and to be faithful to the love revealed in Jesus. Grasp hold of that and we are indeed being built up in the likeness of Christ and becoming, piece by piece, members of his body, the Church.**

**Amen.**