

Happy Easter! Romans 3.21-31

Home Group Notes

Welcome:

1. How have you coped with the snow?
2. Each of you think of a film / story that has a eucatastrophe.

Worship: Psalm 51. Sing an Easter Hymn *Thine be the glory*, listen to something from Handels Messiah!

Word:

1. Read Romans 3.21-31.
2. Any one remember anything James said?
3. What is this word Righteousness?
4. Where is this goodnews in the Law and Prophets (extra points for anyone who can refer to Jeremiah!)
5. I'm not as bad a sinner as you – so how can Paul say There's no difference?
6. How do I get what God has done in Christ Jesus in to my life?
7. What does Grace mean ?
8. What does Redemption mean?
9. What does Atonement mean?
10. How might you have a different view of Communion after this?
11. How does Justice fit into this?
12. Why can't I boast?
13. The more that this goodnews sinks in the more questions should spring to mind – eg vs 31 Do we nullify the law? I'll talk about that next time, maybe. What questions are coming up amongst you. If this is true then what about ...?

Works:

No works this week. Its all about faith. So I'll let you pray so long as you don't think it's a work and make work of it!

Happy Easter!

You have endured **so many weeks of impending** Judgement from Jeremiah and that's quite tiring I know – we'll be back to him next week! And you've had quite a few weeks of St Paul saying **We really are altogether** up a creek without a paddle. And as someone said to me after last week's sermon, they think their boat is definitely **sinking**. The aim was not to **make you feel rubbish** and feel guilty and a waste of space. The aim was to create in you some level of **Humility** that says I recognise that I sin, that I hurt others by the sins that I do. But it was **more than** just recognising that from **time to time you clock up** the odd sin or two – it was about getting a grip on just **how bad** the situation is – we live we breath in an atmosphere of sin, we are Under Sin. Its in our nature and we have learned it in our nurture.

We've learned to find **excuses** – Everyone sins so it doesn't matter, mine aren't as bad as yours, I go to Church and so that should make all the difference and excuse my sins, its not my fault anyway. And we've found that these excuses **don't bring us as much comfort** as we hoped, they still leave us up a creek in a sinking canoe and no paddle. This should leave us feeling very humble.

We saw also that it ought to leave us full of **sympathy** for everyone else. There is of course that selfish streak in us that wants to **get ourselves saved** and sorted first, but this humility should lead us to a sort of **blitz spirit**, an empathy towards everyone else – we're **all up** the same creek and all our boats are leaking.

There's no room for arrogance and there's plenty of space for us to be **helping** each other and cutting each other some **slack**. I read recently how people want **sermons** to be relevant to their lives – give us some **wisdom** – said one young man, so how about this for wisdom – **Cut people some slack**, curiously the only people who need to be given a bit more slack are the very people that are tugging on yours. Its easy to be kind to people who're kind and nice already. But to be kind to someone who's **pushing all your buttons**. Well, cut them some slack.

Now, back to St Paul - And here comes our **happy easter**. Tolkien called it a **Eucatastrophe** – you know what a catastrophe is, well that feeling that you get **just before** hand that all is not well and that this story, your life's story, is about to come **crashing** down about you. Well a Eucatastrophe is a **sudden, unexpected upturn**, we love it when it happens in films, the shoe fits **Cinderella**, Mr Darcy proposes once more to Lizzy **Bennet**, Darth Vader kills the evil Emperor.

That's all very well in stories but when they happen in real life then that's amazing – the **tomb is empty**, your sins forgiven and a new life is breathed into you. That's eucatastrophe.

You know all the **bad news**, you know that you sin, as Paul puts it here, in my view rather mildly, – **all fall short** of the glory of God – this idea of falling short - later Paul will say that the **wages of sin** is death – a little stronger – but today enjoy the milder phrase We fall short.

Boromir finds himself tempted to borrow the ring from little Frodo. Boromir is just beginning to act suspicious towards Frodo and Boromir says to Frodo – Why do you recoil from me? I am no thief! And Frodo says **You are not yourself**. What a lovely, **disarming**, kind thing to say. You are not yourself. You are not currently living and behaving in the way that **God has made you** to be. You sin, You are not yourself. You are up a creek in a **leaky canoe** and no paddle.

St Paul says But Now. Tolkien calls it a **Eucatastrophe** – everything's about to go horribly wrong and there's a sudden good change. But Now.

But Now everything is different. You can be **right with God**, You can **know** that you can be right with God and God did it. God did it all. And that means it's been done **properly** and well and it'll last forever. **But Now** you can be right with God. Its just marvellous, it's the best New Year's present you could hear.

I don't operate very well when I am **not right** with certain people. God has made me and knows me better than I know myself. So **when He and I** are not on speaking terms then it **affects me** in all sorts of ways and it affects all sorts of other friendships. Odds are on you won't notice except that I'm being a **bit short** or cranky and if you're really bold you could say something like – Did you have a **row with Lucy**? You just seem a bit out of sorts today. I dare you to ask me Did you have a row with the Almighty!

But Now, a righteousness from God has been made known. God has made it possible for us to be **friends with Him**. How did God do it – well He did it through Jesus, on the cross, Good Friday.

I can be right with God. For me to be **right with some** people it costs – I have to say **Sorry**, I have to buy the **toy** that I broke, I have to buy some **flowers** (I'm not at all sure I've ever bought Lucy flowers), I have to be **helpful** around the house – that helps but it doesn't **cure** it! You get the idea.

How am I going to be right with God? Well I'll try, I'll follow my **conscience** as best I can and do some good – that's got to help – but we know that it **doesn't cure** the problem, it doesn't mend the relationship, and then I make a mistake, I **fall short**, and we're back to square one.

But Now. Jesus comes and he takes a hold of the sin that **clogs up** our lives and cuts us off from God and He takes that upon Himself. And that's what opens us up to a **friendship** with the Almighty.

Usually around Good Friday, we talk about the Religious Leaders of the time and their **reasons for killing** Jesus. Today I want you to think about it from another angle. **Jesus sacrifices himself**. Its not that weird a concept – we see it in films all the time, Gandalf falls off the bridge of **Khazadum** fighting the Balrog and buying the hobbits time to escape. Fly you fools!

The **early church** saw the death of Jesus very much in terms of Jesus' death **defeating the devil** – if you can bear to watch Mel Gibson's film The Passion – as Jesus dies, the camera pans down to hell and you see a curiously androgynous Satan crying out in **anger**, realising what has happened and that he has **finally failed**.

St Paul talks about **God presenting Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement** – very much old testament language. Later on in as I preach my way through Romans I hope to talk to you about the language of Redemption and the slave market and also of the Law Court – its all here in this passage too, all this stuff about Justice.

The Punchline to it all is **You can be right with God**.

But it's okay to look under the car **bonnet** and say Well how does this work? Paul uses the language of Justice. What Paul is trying to convey here is that God has made us friends with Him and **not by fiddling** things. He has done it right and good and proper, filled out all the paperwork, gone through all the proper channels.

God has **not pulled** a fast one, changed the rules and said Oh it **doesn't matter**, lets just be friends. He has said **Justice is important** and if we take the rule of Justice away from the Universe then you won't be able to trust anything anymore. God doesn't change the rules. He says **Justice** must be satisfied. **Sin** matters, **Judgement** matters, Justice Matters. Its only fair!

This is really important because not only has God opened up a way for us to be **friends** with God but we **can even Know** that we can be right with God. It's good to be right with someone but it's **even better to know** that you are right with them.

So the **punishment** for our sins that God has held back from giving to us, **God now lets loose on Himself**, on His Son, on Jesus. Justice is done.

And this gives us a fresh **appreciation** of Holy **Communion**. Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice – **John's** Gospel is full of this approach, John spells it out so that we know that the **Passover Lamb** was killed at the same time that Jesus was being crucified. A celebration of The Lamb who took away the sins of the **Israelites** in Egypt. The angel of death passes over the houses **where this sacrifice has happened** so the Israelites are freed by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

And now St John and St Paul are both saying Look at Jesus, the **Passover Lamb of God** who dies for us so that we might be freed **from our Egypt**, our oppression, from being Under Sin – not just a freedom from the little sins that we deal with day in day out, but we're now **taken out of Egypt**, we're now right with God.

None of this is new. Paul says the Law and the Prophets told us about this long ago. **Isaiah** said 800 years before Paul wrote his letter – ISA 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was **crushed for our iniquities**; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and **by his wounds** we are healed. ISA 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

This is **Passover**, Atonement at work. Justice is done. The Sacrifice of Jesus has **not been a fudge** but has fulfilled all the criteria, it has worked, we can be right with God. And we can know that we can be right with God. **How do we know?** Well we know from **History** – from the fact of Good Friday and the evidence of the Resurrection. We know from what happens when we come to **take Communion**.

I know sometimes we're in a rush and the **kids are tugging** at your sleeve wanting a bit of the bread. But sometimes there's a moment and it's **filled with your gratitude** and with your guilt and sorrow and **who am I** to be eating this bread. And something peculiar and **powerful happens** as you nibble a bit of tasteless wafer – if you think about it, it's just a small lump of yeasted wheat and a sip of cheap port – it really shouldn't add up to much – but if you **Do think** about it, then there's a moment, a thin moment when God has come close to you. Maybe you've **noticed** it and it doesn't matter if you haven't because **it's still true**. You have **imbibed** God, that act of faith is what **all this faith talk** is about.

Paul goes on to talk about **Boasting** – you can't boast when you're up a creek in a sinking canoe and someone throws you a lifeline. You can only **boast about how good God** is. You can't boast that you've been ever so good, better than some people you could mention. **Picture what heaven** would be like if we were allowed to boast – Oh yes I'm here because I built a hospital, **Well I built 5 schools**, Gosh it would be awful. Thank God its all about Grace and Gift.

There's a view that all this Being Right With God stuff is fine **for the day you die**, its all about getting you to heaven, Pie in the Sky stuff. On the one hand I'm okay with that – Some of us are already thinking about our **Summer Holidays** and it helps us to cope with the darker days we live in. So I won't knock the Pie in the Sky preachers. But read this stuff again, there's **no talk here** about this being a Long term investment, or Not much use until your death bed – this is all about **how you live your life now**.

At one level this is to do with **how you think of yourself**. Who am I? How do I relate to other people? IF I'm relating to the **Almighty** then I can **hold fast** to the task that I'm called to do. If God and Me are getting on okay then **I can afford to lose** face, I can apologise for getting something wrong. I don't have to be like this, think like this, **react like this**, because I know what God has given me. And that makes all the difference in the world to who you are as a **husband/ wife and employee** or employer.

This **isn't a service of Holy** Communion which is a shame really as now would be a good point at which to break bread. Last week you were supposed to go out **humble** and **sympathetic**. This week you're allowed to feel positively **euphoric**, mildly tipsy perhaps. The Good News that has just fallen into your laps, the **eucatastrophe** that now turns our lives upside down.

We need to **hear this personally** and individually. We each need to respond to it. I remember feeling over awed when I began to **twig** that all this religious **nonsense** that I'd learned for years and years – its all **true**, its all **powerful** and its **given**.

The Americans would use the word **awesome**. One Pentecostal preacher who preached to a silent and unresponsive Anglican congregation of trainee vicars (she was very good preacher) she spoke about the goodness of this immense good news and she leaned over the pulpit and said "**Someone say Hallelujah!**"

As we go on through Romans, we're going to discover that this goodnews **isn't just good for you** and me, but its good for us as a **community**, its good for this **nation**, this world, and **not just at a human** level but at every level, its good for the whole of creation and Paul will go one step further and say its good for the **Cosmos**. There really is no limit to this Good News, to this Eucatastrophe, this **But Now**. Hallelujah! Amen!