

Rejoice, we're Reconciled! Romans 5.1-11 14th February 2010.

Home Group Notes

6th March – have you bought your tickets yet and some for your friends. It'll be a fab evening and one of those Oh if only we'd known it was going to be that good ...

Early warning: 11th March (Thursday) Chris Lear (Reader in Training) will be doing the One Lent Evening with Chailey and Newick coming. 7 for 7.30pm in St Mary's. "Christian Heroes".

Worship: try Psalm 8 better still sing and rejoice: O praise ye the Lord!

Welcome & Word:

1. What was the last wedding you went to? How did it make you feel?
2. Why is the paperwork (of baptism or confirmation) still important?
3. Read Romans 5.1-3
4. What does Paul list as being the benefits of our faith (I count 8 in the whole passage see if you can find more)?
5. Read vss 3-5
6. How does the suffering bit make sense (a) if the word really means persecution (b) does it still work when broadened to include different sorts of illnesses?
7. Read vss 6-8
8. Explain the hymn book thing to someone under 10. eg my Sam.
9. Read vss 9-12
10. What does this say about my past sins, and my future struggles?
11. What silly / simple / profound ways to you use to remind yourself that you are a Christian?
12. What is faith, how do I get some, how do I get my faith to grow? Any suggestions?

Works:

Hmm, seems hard to ask you to do a work after all that talk of faith. But pray all the same.

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I once married a woman – not in the sense that I married Lucy, in the other use of the word – and she said in the vestry – It's **unbelievable** I just don't believe I'm married! She said it in a good and excited kind of way. It still **hasn't sunk in** yet! I said Well look at your **wedding ring** – there, that's **proof**. I said Look at this **Marriage Certificate**, that's proof that what you struggling to get your head around really happened and is really true. I didn't tell her that there may be **days ahead** when she will wake up and **not feel very married** or when she might **feel** unworthy of her man, or even feel cross at her husband and even momentarily wish she wasn't married. But of course none of that would change a thing. When you're married, you're married. Its there, **sealed in law**, on paper and on her finger.

There maybe days ahead when you **don't feel very Christian**, when you feel that you are a bit of a **failure** at the whole Christian thing. You're **struggling** to believe, you're struggling with a **sin**, with a moral **dilemma** and you don't know which way to turn. You're not feeling very spiritual and it's been a while since you picked up your bible and prayed. But the truth is that when you have **said your vow** to God, God has said His vow to you and **that's an end to it**.

St Paul is **wanting** you to **know the certainty** of this and so he spells out now the implications, the fruits of our faith.

So far in his letter to the Romans, Paul has been looking at how keen we are to judge others and make ourselves look good. So we've looked at **various Thems and Theys** and how very godless they are and Paul said Don't judge them, they are your ancestors and they are what now makes up this society! Paul started to look at **different Yous**, you who are very moral and enjoy judging others and we found that the trick here is to **hide your sins by pointing** up other people's mistakes. Oh I might be a sinner but at least I'm not as bad as her! That sort of nonsense.

And then we looked at **Yous who have all the religious paperwork** and as a result think that they can live how they like and presume upon God. And we saw that people without the Paperwork but with the Heart were closer to God. The **Paperwork is good** but it's supposed to be a sign that something else is at work deep within you.

And so at last Paul came to the glorious conclusion that we are **all up a creek, without a paddle**, in a leaky canoe. And we learned about what it is that Jesus has done for us.

And we struggled to believe that **God has done all this for you** and for me. That God has sent Jesus to be an **atonement sacrifice** for our sins.

I did that hand thing with **the hymn book**.

We saw that what God did in Jesus fitted God's character in terms of meeting the needs of **Justice** and yet also being full of **mercy** and love and **faithfulness**.

The trouble with that is that it left a **loophole** for **hypocrites** to exploit and that's true but it's better than being legalistic! And the other trouble is that we're rather **proud** and we quite like to know that we've **earned** or deserved something.

This is why some of those listening to Paul would have said – Look I've always been a good Jew and we've always looked to **Abraham as a good role model** - and then Paul butts in and says Yes, Abraham! And how did he get right with God – **by faith**, by believing, by trusting.

It's all about faith.

Now there's **one more heresy** that we have to look out for and that is the danger of **turning Faith into some sort of work** – ooh look at me I have more faith than you, my faith is bigger than yours. I once saw a t-shirt that said Does my faith look big in this?!

In the Church we occasionally use this word Faith in the sense of it really being a **clever bit of Work**: you've clearly got faith **if you're on enough rotas** and if you give enough money to the church and if you can name the first 7 books of the New Testament. Ah then you've got faith. We **make faith the goal**, the result of what we're trying to achieve. We forget that faith is the starting point. Everything **grows out of faith**.

We think that **If you learn enough** then maybe you'll have faith. So we could look at the **historicity** of Jesus and Pilate and we could look at the evidence for the Resurrection and we could conclude that the Resurrection is the best way of understanding all the **evidence**. And that **might help** your faith.

We could **study Judaism** and understand the anthropology of religion and the sacrificial metaphor that started with **Abraham not sacrificing Isaac** but sacrificing a lamb and how that action showed Abraham did trust God.

And then we could move on to the **Passover** in Egypt and the **rescue** of God's people from oppression and slavery and talk again about how believing in the sacrifice of the **lamb** is the key to their freedom and the Promised Land.

And this would give you a **good grasp of theology** and that **might help** your faith.

But I know plenty of theologians and historians who **don't have faith in Jesus**. Faith is about accepting a truth and then living in the light of that truth. Its about **accepting all the wonders that** come from that.

Faith is **accepting the truth** that you're now married and living like you're married. Faith is accepting the truth of **what has happened**.

Jesus has come and lived and died and risen again so that we can be forgiven and be friends with God. That **has happened**. Faith is you saying I know that that has happened and **I'm going to live in the light of that truth**.

I can dress it up in complicated words and we can pop the lid on how this all works – in fact St Paul goes on to do that in the next passage which is **massively complicated** and I wanted to postpone teaching that for a bit! But for today we need to take on board the wonderful implications of this faith of ours. And the key thing to grasp is that there is More. **There is More**.

We have been justified by God, we have been **declared not guilty**, we now have **peace** with God and it is Jesus that has done all this. We have **access** to God, access to His **presence**, access to His kindness and mercy, to His **grace**.

I mentioned earlier about our pride and how we do like to know that we deserve something. But **grace** is quite different. The best definition I've heard is this – **Justice is getting** what you deserve, Mercy is **not getting** what you deserve, Grace is getting what you **don't deserve!** And it's just marvellous and **all you can do is accept** it as the new truth.

This is what Confirmation is. It is us turning to God and saying our vows and saying **I accept that this is the truth** about who I am and who Jesus is and what He has done for me. I accept these implications.

I accept that I am **declared not guilty** by you. I accept that I am **at peace**, right now with God. I accept that I have **access** to my heavenly father and that this isn't the kind of access where I **grovel** on hands and knees, where I burn my crops, or animals or children in order to **squeeze** something out of the gods, but rather I **stand in the presence** of the Almighty!

This should lead to a good bit of **rejoicing!** Rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. Rejoicing that we have now received reconciliation.

St Paul really wants you to know this and to **know that you're allowed to know this**.

You are **at peace** with God, **justified** and **reconciled**. That's bigger than winning 100 million on the Euro lottery; it's even bigger than the euphoric rush that comes from being **married**. It's utterly astonishing. Even while we were **still sinners**, **enemies** with God, **powerless** to save ourselves God made the first move.

You all know how hard it is to make the first move when you've **fallen out** with someone one. Adam wronged God and **we've carried on that tradition**. And yet it is God who has turned to us and made the first move. That's amazing.

This means that my **past sins are dealt** with by his blood and it means that my **present and future life is held** in His Life. Elsewhere Paul says "I live in Christ" – you need a **venn** diagram in order to really see that.

Paul is trying to **blow the roof off** our comfortable boxed faith. Because if we can really accept this as the new truth about who I am, who God is, **how I relate to God** and to others and the world then that **changes everything**.

So Paul says the most **absurd** thing ever – We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God! Not only so but we also rejoice in our **sufferings!**

Well that makes no sense at all! But Paul is trying to convey the huge and **far reaching implications** of faith.

It starts as small as a **mustard** seed and as it grows through your mind and your thinking and **your life**, it starts to affect your behaviour and your **mercy** and then it affects your **swearing**, how you spend your **time**, how you **deal** with other people, it might even affect your **wallet!**

It might even affect how you view **suffering**. This might be better translated as **persecution**, it's to do with having a hard time because of your faith. (the word is used once of child birth).

In Paul's day being a Christian meant risking being covered in tar and used as a night light in Nero's garden.

It might mean being thrown to the Lions. Tertullian (300ad ish) joked (highly paraphrased) We're always hearing the cry Christians to the Lion, Christians to the Lion. What? All of us to one lion!?

But **faith can grow in us** and give us that kind of strength. So suffering produces **stickability** and God likes commitment because it strengthens our **character** and makes us solid and reliable people and produces another **spin off of hope**.

And we need **hope**. This is a difficult life. Paul has lavished on us all these marvellous wonders – justified, peace, access to God, standing before Him, rejoicing, reconciled. It surely doesn't **get better than this**.

And then we remember the **difficult reality** that we live in. The people we don't get on with, the **health** worries that we carry with us, the decisions that we're **struggling** with. Its not that we don't believe, it's just that **sometimes we forget to apply that faith**.

We need hope and we find it in our **hearts**. God has, **past tense**, has poured out His love into our hearts. Elsewhere Paul prays for a Church saying **May your hearts be strengthened** so that you're capable of grasping just how high and wide and deep is the love of God. It's so immense that Paul thinks we need our **internal organs** to be reinforced!

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom, He **has given** – note again the past tense – the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us. It is just **unbelievably marvellous**. And all that is left is for us to say **Yes this is true** and I want to live in the light of this truth.

Jesus to **Nicodemus** uses the imagery of being **born all over again**. St John in the book of revelation uses the imagery of being **married to God**.

Take a moment in the prayers that follow, take time out after the service and before coffee and you're swamped again with your children, go find some space in the prayer corner and say an **"I do" to God's proposal**.

This is the truth of who you now are, **now accept it**, rejoice in it, believe it and live this faith! Amen.