

Sunday 23rd May 2021
Romans 8:1-8
Rev.Scott Burton
Brightons Parish Church

And Amen! Thank you sister, thank you.

Growing up in Whitburn uh yet going to high school in Bathgate which is about five miles away as a young 17 year old I had a lot of motivation to learn to drive I duly took my lessons and then sat my test and somehow managed to pass with no minors which would never happen nowadays and it was great to pass but there was no way I was content with that, I had to get driving, I had to have my own car, and so, I used my savings, I used my wages, I even think I got a loan from my parents, so that I could buy my first car a red Fiat Cinquicento. It was the smallest box on wheels, a bit of a death trap probably, but I valued getting the keys and putting what I learned into practice so that I could have my freedom and a real sense of adventure even, and Paul's letters kind of have some of this expectation in them as well, including the letter to the Romans.

Paul has spent 11 chapters explaining the Good News saying why it was necessary for Jesus to come and declaring what Jesus had achieved, and then its impact upon individuals who respond in faith, and our previous series in Joshua kind of ended on a bit of a similar note, of focusing on the great sacrifice and work of Jesus who died for broken, rebellious, humanity are people who keep breaking trust with their Maker and yet, in that series, we time and time again came back to the Cross remembering what we have through Jesus, that we are justified before our Heavenly Father and so, we are now part of His family.

We have received mercy, upon mercy, and He has come to be with us, not only as a body of believers, but within us, residing within us, by His Holy Spirit, confirming our redemption as heirs of the Kingdom of God. Yet, for Paul, it's not enough just to end there at chapter 11. There's more, there's drive, there's expectation of what this should mean in the Christian's life and so he goes on for four more chapters.

Because there should be a response there should be something coming off this, a taking up of keys we might say, and so Paul says "Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship." Here's the expectation of Paul, it's not enough just to impart or rehearse knowledge of God, but that this reconciled relationship with the Lord should lead to something in a person's life. Paul says we are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, we're to yield, we're to give over our lives to God, and underpinning this is Paul's understanding of a person, because in his Hebrew understanding, talking of the body would speak of a whole person, all of life, and so we're to give all our lives in worship to God, a yielding, a giving over as a living sacrifice. It's to be in the day-to-day, moment by moment, parts of lives, and, if we do this, he says, it is pleasing to God, but it is also holy and that is given over to His purposes, it is dedicated to Him it says, also it is worship. Worship is more than just turning up to church, it's more than singing songs, it is the giving of our lives and if we will do this he says it is true worship, true worship that is more than ceremony or obligation, it is more than just an abstract thinking process in our heads, or even a purely inward spirituality, true faith, true worship is seen in how you live your life - picking up the keys, picking up

the keys God has given you and entering into all of that, and to do anything else, his final word I want to draw is proper, because to do anything else would be unthinkable, improper. The only appropriate response to the mercy, upon mercy we have received, is to give our lives in worship, to give our lives in worship.

So, can I ask friends, do you have faith, do you have faith, is that faith in Jesus and if it is, if you have that, are you offering yourself in worship, are you offering your life to God throughout the week, throughout the week. But how do we do this? what does that look like?

Even well Paul will spend the rest of his letters detailing this, but in the verses we've got remaining for us, three brief things to highlight for us:

He says, firstly do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good pleasing and perfect will. Paul is saying don't be pressed into the mould of this world, with its values and priorities, don't let it continue to stamp its mark on you, or as one commentator put it, 'do not follow the fleeting fashion of this world but undergo a complete change'. Fashions come and go, one minute it's flares, then it's a straight before you know it we're back to flares. Aren't we yet, instead of swaying back and forth with the fashions of the this world, or allowing it to force us into its shape, we're to follow the example of Jesus way. For he said 'I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me.' To do the Father's will was the core of Jesus life. When we learn the will of God and allow it to shape our lives, Paul says, by having our minds renewed, we learn to think God's thoughts, after Him, His values, His ways.

Now, of course, it's a process and it takes time, and yet it's made possible through His word and by His Spirit. Paul says elsewhere 'all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training.' and elsewhere he also says 'live by the Spirit and then you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.'

So, I wonder, friends, are we in our Bibles, are we reading His word, making space for it and it's not even enough just to be doing that, I would say, I think in that space and time you'll grow all the more if you will engage in relationship with Him as you read His word, if you say 'Lord, what does this look like in my life? How have I to change?' Talk to Him, pray over it, tell Him your honest struggles, and your hopes and dreams, cry out to Him for help and as we do these things, we create space for the Spirit to draw alongside us and shape and change us.

Now, as we do this, and our thinking and our character changes, such that we increasingly are worshiping God by living according to His will.

Paul adds our third thing, that we're to be humbly involved in the church. He says 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you in Christ. We though many, form one body and each member belongs to all the others.' Paul's saying,

remember your faith journey. That's what he means of 'the faith God has distributed', remember the faith journey. We're all incomplete, we we're all imperfect, we've broken trust with God, and yet He has lavished His love upon us by reconciling us to Himself through Jesus and so, there's no place for boasting, there's no place for it, there should only be humility, there should be something of Jesus seen in us, Jesus who made Himself nothing and took the very nature of a servant and so, likewise, we are called to emulate Jesus in that way, and be part an active part of our local church, That's where we belong, here with one another, warts and all, so what about us, what about us brothers and sisters, do we look down on anyone, do we do we say to someone 'Well this is my church more than it's your church.'

And as things begin to open up and restrictions ease, alongside planning your Summer holidays what else are you planning? Are you planning to give any time to your church family? Are you planning to reconnect and encourage?

Because it is our Father's will that we humbly recognize that we belong to one another.

He died to make it so and as part of that belonging finally Paul says, we have a part to play and this is where we read of God's grace today. We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. You can see I've added in the Greek for the two words of gift and grace and you can see how closely tied they are that gift actually comes from the word grace in the Greek and Peter says something very similar he says each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. Before the service ends today we are ordaining four new elders for the form of grace, God's grace, upon their lives is of leadership and shepherding God's people.

Today is also Pentecost Sunday, if you weren't aware, that day when we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church as a gift as God's grace and our lives, to enable us to be part of all He would purpose, Because to each of us who claims faith in Jesus the Spirit is given to reside in us, to reside in us and He gives spiritual gifts, God-given enablement, grace in action, we might say, to serve His purposes and His people.

Now the gifts listed here are not all of the gifts. We know from other letters there are more besides, but as I was working through the New Testament Reading Plan and preparing for this series I was mindful of seeing these gifts just pop up time and time again. Recently, in the Book of Acts, sure we see the apostles but we see prophets as well, we see teachers, but we also see people serving, we see people being encouraged and giving encouragement but also sacrificially giving to generously support one another, and we see mercy in the darkest and hardest of times. It's all there, every one of the gifts and they're all still for today including the supernatural gifts because there's nothing in scripture to say they've done away with.

Now, does your natural gifting help you understand what your spiritual gifts are? - not necessarily. Is your spiritual gift connected or unconnected rather to your natural gifts? - not always. So how do you know how can we figure out what our spiritual gifts are?

I'm not sure there's a quick or easy fix to that so you're not probably going to walk away with an answer by the end of today, but there's a few things to say.

Firstly you'll never figure it out if you don't get involved often you need to step out in faith first, and give something a shot, maybe even something you think 'I could never do that!' I didn't just jump into a pulpit one day, it was a journey, it was a journey.

Secondly, we discerned together as a church family and that's what we did with our new elders today, your names came forward because the elders, the existing elders said 'Yeah, we see something in them.' and then that was processed with you through a conversation and prayer and giving time, and then they were presented to the wider church family saying 'Are we off the mark here?' nothing came back, just to let you know you're all good, because over the years we've seen something in you that suggests to us God has gifted you for this call.

But we're all called, we're all gifted, so I wonder, brothers and sisters, how are you serving? where are you offering your gifts? We're all called to play our part in the purposes of God. He calls us to take out what's been given. He's given us the keys so that we might experience an adventure with Him, not just a religion of morals and nice stories and turning up to oddly shaped building once a week. We have more than that because friends, we are reconciled to the living God and so will we offer our lives in worship to Him and will that offering be done with humility sure, but will it be done with enthusiasm as well? Church with enthusiasm, because He's called us to be part of His family and to every one of us He has gifted us by the Spirit.

I hope and pray that we will, and so, in a few moments, we're going to ordain our new elders and then together, both here in the sanctuary and at home, we're going to share in a renewal of commitment as a church family but first we have our hymn of preparation.