

Daily Devotions from the URC

Titus

4th – 21st July 2018



Introduction

Not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, Titus was noted in Galatians (cf. Gal. 2:1, 3) where Paul wrote of journeying to Jerusalem with Barnabas, accompanied by Titus. He was then dispatched to Corinth, Greece, where he successfully reconciled the Christian community there with Paul, its founder. Titus was later left on the island of Crete to help organize the Church, and later met back with the Apostle Paul in Nicopolis. He soon went to Dalmatia (now Croatia). According to Eusebius of Caesarea in the Ecclesiastical History, he served as the first bishop of Crete and remained there in his old years. He was buried in Crete but his head was, later, moved to Venice. The Pauline authorship, once universally acknowledged, is disputed by some scholars now.

*Andy Braunston
Daily Devotions from the URC Project
Coordinator*

what is happening, even to people who use the building but are not worshippers. Equally, some friends have moved to other parts of the country, but contact has not been lost. From Essex those contacts spread from Mid Wales to Devon, Suffolk and the South Coast. The needs of individuals is important, and this was the intention of Paul!

Perhaps our emphasis should be moving from counting the numbers coming into church and replacing that with consideration as to how we as local churches can reach out into the local community. Many churches are now involved with the operation of local food banks, or perhaps play host to marginalised groups or individuals, so what is happening where you are?

Prayer

Lord, so often we turn a blind eye
to what is going on both around us.
We see and hear of all sorts of hatred and conflicts,
yet we do little or nothing.
Forgive us, Lord, forgive us when our
own comfort and convenience becomes paramount.
Teach us your way of not counting the cost,
but freely sharing Your love for us with all whom we meet,
praying for guidance in Jesus' name. Amen

[Table of Contents](#)

Wednesday 4th July Titus 1: 1- 4.....4
Thursday 5th July Titus 1: 5-65
Friday 6th July Titus 1: 7-9.....6
Saturday 7th July Titus 1: 10-16.....8
Sunday 8th July Psalm 5410
Monday 9th July Titus 2: 1-2.....11
Tuesday 10th July Titus 2: 3-513
Wednesday 11th July Titus 2: 6-8.....15
Thursday 12th July Titus 2: 9-10.....16
Friday 13th July Titus 2: 11-1517
Saturday 14th July Titus 3: 1-2.....19
Sunday 15th July Psalm 55: 1-8.....20
Monday 16th July Titus 3: 3 - 522
Tuesday 17th July Titus 3: 6-8.....24
Wednesday 18th July Titus 3: 9-11.....26
Thursday 19th July Gregory of Nyssa & his sister Macrina27
Friday 20th July SS Thomas More and John Fisher,30
Saturday 21st July Titus 3: 12-1533

Wednesday 4th July Titus 1: 1- 4

The Rev'd Joshua Thomas is Minister of Petersfield and Liss URC with Bordon.

Reading

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness, in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began— in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour, to Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Reflection

How many of us have pondered the questions – 'who am I?' and 'why am I here?' We can think about these questions on a basic level, each of us has a name, each our own personal story and each one of us will have goals and aspirations which can help to form our identity. But when we think about our being, our personal identity and the meaning of our lives, do we do so with God at the centre; is God's will firmly in mind at all times. The letter to Titus sets a challenge to us. It was written to a very ordinary set of believers and encourages them, and us, to consider their (and our) lives as an expression of the will of God. Once we do this, any sense of ordinariness is out of the picture, no matter which direction God has led us in. We are all a vital piece of the puzzle of God's plan for the world and each piece has meaning and value.

In this salutation, Paul tries to set out what he believes is his purpose. He speaks of himself as God's 'servant'. This is unique to this Epistle, although in other writing he does refer to himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. A servant is someone who is committed to their master, they

Saturday 21st July Titus 3: 12-15

The Rev'd Colin Hunt, retired minister worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

Reading

When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing. And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you

Reflection

Today we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to Titus. This letter, together with the letter to Timothy are the last of his writings before Paul's death. He writes from Nicopolis in the Epirus region of Greece where he is staying for the Winter. If Titus was to join him, then he would have to move quickly as the sea crossing from Crete was stormy and dangerous during winter. Paul ends his letter with personal greetings. We know nothing about Artemus as this is the only reference to him in our Bibles and other than giving us his name there are no other details, but Tychicus on the other hand was one of Paul's trusted messengers. Paul is anxious that the pastoral work on the island continues. He wants the members of that congregation to feel supported.

For many years, the pastoral support of our local church has not been left to one person, the minister, but a group established to care for the wider community, both church attendees and the surrounding area including schools and organisations for the less able. As a group, they meet regularly with the minister to ensure he was/is aware of

message to people who were like common 'clay jars' (used for everyday storage, and probably chipped or cracked – not for guests).

It's an important lesson for today: God still trusts that powerful and life-giving gospel message to ordinary people, who can expect to be 'afflicted in every way, but not crushed...'.¹

It's God's message, not ours, and it's up to us - the ordinary people - to share it from within the culture of our time. With confidence we need to challenge what is wrong, and speak out for what is right, knowing our actions and words are true, because like More and Fisher, we've grasped opportunities to learn.

As our friends and companions begin to understand why we do what we do and say what we say, we embark on the path that will eventually bring new disciples to Christ.

Prayer

Lord,
We know that you called us to make new disciples,
and know that no-one said it will be easy.
Help us to be confident in talking about our faith.
Help us to work within our own culture.
Help us to accept that this is your message.
Help us to feel that you are with us at all times.
Give us strength when we feel afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, or struck down.
Amen

are compelled to act for them and will be submissive to their masters will. Paul's ministry focused on salvation and the spiritual growth of others. He lived to bring God's people to faith and maturity in Christ. He did this by encouraging them, not only did he sow the seed, he cultivated it. God's purpose remained at the centre and Paul was keen to encourage this way of life. Let us commit to trying to live our lives seeking God's will and placing it at the centre of all we do and all we are.

Prayer

Lord God, we often ask ourselves, who are we and why are we here? Your purpose for us can seem fuzzy and unclear. Help us to refocus our minds and to set you at the centre of our lives. Help us with the help of others to discern where it is you might be leading us, and may we always truly mean the words we often pray, your will be done. Amen.

[Thursday 5th July Titus 1: 5-6](#)

Val Morrison is an elder in Hall Gate URC, Doncaster and a former Moderator of General Assembly

Reading

I left you behind in Crete for this reason, that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious

Reflection

Paul's mandate to Titus. I left you behind ...to put in order what needs to be done to find the right leaders for Christ's emerging church. Commendable as the list of standards for appointment to the Eldership is, what strikes me is that there is no room for manoeuvre.

There are a number of passages in Paul's letters which give similar requirements and I have heard Elders today say 'so what am I doing as an Elder if that is the standard?'

But what this reminded me of more than anything is that tendency in many of us to want to control, whether that is in our church life, our home life or our work life. We have been doing a task for some time, we have had responsibility for some event and there is a suggestion that it is time someone else took on the task, do the organising. Our reaction is to think that 'they' will not do it like we did – the implication being 'they' will not do it as well as we did. It is true that someone else is unlikely to do whatever it is like we did it but, given the opportunity, they may not just do it differently they may even do it better!

When God calls us to his tasks he doesn't give us detailed instructions, he challenges us to work with him through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to fulfil that task. He trusts us to use all our life experience and some of that may include experiences of which we are not proud, to enable us to give Him the glory as we serve him.

If God can trust us then surely we should be able to trust each other.

Prayer

Gracious God, we confess that we can be arrogant enough to think we are the only ones with the ability to undertake the tasks you set us. We thank you for your trust in us and ask that we may have the same trust in others so that everyone, using their whole life experience, may serve you in all they do. Amen

Friday 6th July Titus 1: 7-9

The Rev'd Jacky Embrey, Mersey Synod Moderator

Reading

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture — 'I believed, and so I spoke' — we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Reflection

It must have been lonely for More and Fisher as they defended their scholarly understanding and principles of their faith against a powerful king who had decided to go his own way, make his own rules and look after his own interests. Yet they resolutely stood against Henry – and paid the ultimate price.

Sometimes it might feel like that for churches struggling to bring new disciples to Christ. What price will we pay?

21st century culture can seem self-centred, and perhaps some people (like Henry 500 years earlier) go their own way, make their own rules and look after their own interests. It's that 'because I'm worth it' culture. Can we live in 21st century consumerist Western world and still share Christ's message of love?

Paul pulled no punches as he wrote his second letter to the Christians in Corinth when they were facing similar conflicts of interest. He pointed out that God chose to trust the powerful and life-giving gospel

Friday 20th July SS Thomas More and John Fisher,
Reformation Martyrs

Linda Rayner. URC Co-ordinator for Fresh Expressions

Information

Born in London in 1478, Thomas More studied classics and then the law, being called to the Bar at twenty-three years old. His clear honesty and integrity impressed Henry VIII and he appointed Thomas as his Chancellor. He supported the king in his efforts to reform the clergy but disagreed over Henry's disputes with the papacy, caused by the king's desire to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and to find another queen who might provide him with a male heir. Henry could stand no such act of defiance and imprisoned his chancellor in the hope that he would renege. Thomas refused to take the Oath on the Act of Succession, which declared the king to be the only protector and supreme head of the Church in England, and was executed for treason in July 1535, declaring that he died the king's good servant but God's first.

John Fisher was Thomas More's close friend and ally. A brilliant academic, he had substantially reformed the life of the University of Cambridge, through the wealth and influence of his patron, Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII. He was made Bishop of Rochester and proved himself to be a good pastor to his small diocese. As with Thomas, Henry VIII much admired him at first, but when he opposed the king their relationship deteriorated. Aged sixty-six and in indifferent health, he nevertheless endured the trauma of imprisonment in the Tower of London. He was executed just two weeks before Thomas in July 1535.

Reading 2 Corinthians 4. 7–15

We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

Reflection

We could perhaps too easily gloss over these verses when we see that they are about Bishops (literally overseers). We are more used to mutual accountability than hierarchy. However, mutual accountability requires us all to play the part of overseers, as well as to be overseen. Not only that, but we are also all called to be God's stewards, so that the goals listed in these verses are set before each one of us.

I say goals, because we all fall short of them. The trouble is that because we know we'll never be blameless, it's too easy to read these verses without reflecting seriously on how to apply them afresh in our lives. Nevertheless, if we feel that there is a yawning gap between our reality and these goals, then there must surely be something that we can do to get closer to them.

This can be where mutual accountability really comes into its own. One of the best ways to keep our goals in sight is to be part of a small confidential group of people, who can work together in their discipleship, pray for one another, and hold each other accountable.

Our goals need to include a firmer grasp of the word, otherwise how can we live our lives according to it or hold one another to account (which is tantamount to teaching one another)?

Consequently, by using these Daily Devotions you have taken a step towards the goals that the writer has set before us. What will your next one be?

Living God, how can we be blameless?

Sometimes following you seems impossible:

too big an ask – too big a task.

Help us to have the courage to aspire to perfection

and daily to take the next small step in that direction:

to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. For we ask it in his name Amen

Saturday 7th July Titus 1: 10-16

The Rev'd Fiona Thomas, Secretary for Education & Learning and member of Christ Church, Bellingham

Reading

There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision; they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach. It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, 'Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.' That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Reflection

I find it reassuring that the majority of Biblical scholars attribute Titus to the second generation of Epistles. In other words they believe it was not written by Paul but by one of his followers or a sympathetic

wrestling and dialogue, rooted in the liveliness of the renewed inner spiritual life.

They point to the God who is both unchanging and yet present in different ways in different times and places.

I give thanks for the holy life that stays focussed on God in the midst of all the changes and turmoil of the world, yet doesn't seek to duck out of wrestling with the world.

Prayer

Mysterious yet ever-present God,
as I give thanks for Gregory and Macrina,
help me to listen to the words of the wise,
in my brothers, sisters, and friends.

Renew in me the fruitfulness of wrestling in prayer.
Keep me faithful in theological engagement
with my contemporaries outside the faith.

Holy God, one in three and three in one,
You are both shrouded in mystery
And yet close to the human spirit.
Holy Spirit, draw near to my heart
That I may receive your wisdom
Live in your strength
And speak your words of truth.

God is met not as an object to be understood, but as a mystery to be loved.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2. 9-13

As it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" -- these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

Reflection

The 'Cappadocian Four' – Gregory of Nyssa, his brother Basil, their sister Macrina and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, played a key role in the discussions about the nature of the Christian faith in the 4th Century. They connected the rational thinking about what might have seemed the abstract doctrine of the Holy Trinity with the lived-out experience of the Christian life, through the encounter with the Holy Spirit. Their thinking shaped the doctrinal discussions in the Church, and engaged with the philosophical issues of the day about the nature of God. Macrina helped to keep the group rooted in the daily living out of the spiritual life, with her development of the local monastic and convent community.

Two brothers, a sister and a friend wrestled together in the faith.

They entered into a dialogue with those within and outside the Church who held a range of different views. I give thanks for this

commentator on his heritage, several years after the apostle's death. The careful diplomatic work which Titus carried out on Paul's behalf with the church in Corinth described so tactfully by him elsewhere (Galatians 7.5-16 and 8.16-24) is completely contradicted in this passage – unless we have here the equivalent of an internal, personal communication from Paul to Titus that was never intended to be made public.

As the Church struggles to establish some order and stability in a society where all sorts of beliefs get mixed together, the letter to Titus lays down the line and creates an all-purpose attack on any false teaching which may come along. It is polemical, generalised and, frankly, quite nasty, drawing on the Cretan philosopher Epimenides' views from 600 BCE. Christians today would never write such things in letters, e-mails or on social media, would we?

It is understandable that the leader of a community would seek to bolster stability and continuity at a time of flux and insecurity. This fledgling religious movement was vulnerable to different interpretations of its core beliefs, and it was vital to establish some clear irrefutable doctrines. Unfortunately in the process the emphasis tended to be on maintaining the institution through proper behaviour rather than encouraging people to explore the meaning for themselves of the truth of Christ's life, death and resurrection. Christians today would never fall into that pit, would we?

Prayer

God of grace and truth,
when we perceive threats to our beliefs
bless us with stillness, and the ability to pause.
Give us patience and fortitude
to choose words and actions that are powerful and persuasive
so that people will turn to the Way because it offers life. Amen

Sunday 8th July Psalm 54

The Rev'd Terry Hinks is minister of Trinity High Wycombe and Cores End Churches.

1 Save me, O God, by your great name;
with pow'r deliver me.

2 Hear, O my God, the words I speak
and listen to my plea.

3 For strangers are attacking me;
the ruthless seek my life,
For they have no regard for God
and always stir up strife.

4 Consider this: God is my help;
the Lord upholds my way.

5 In faithfulness destroy my foes;
their slander, Lord, repay.

6 I'll bring a sacrifice to you,
a free-will offering;
Because your name, O LORD, is good,
your praises I will sing.

7 For you, O LORD, have rescued me
from my distress and woe;
My eyes have looked in victory
upon my cruel foe.

Reflection

What are the great names in the world today? Donald? George? Angelina? Kim? Vladimir? Beyonce? Teresa? Jeremy? The media is full of names, each bringing a picture or pictures to mind, each having some power to influence people's thoughts and actions, each touching us for good or ill. The Psalmist would have had his own list,

of course we can celebrate what we have in common which is so much greater than what divides – Jesus and his kingdom.

Prayer

Lord, help us to major on the major.

We thank you that what is most important
is to love you and love our neighbour.

When we get sucked into trivial arguments help us to hit the pause
button and focus once again on where we should put our energies.
Amen

Thursday 19th July Gregory of Nyssa & his sister Macrina

The Revd Elizabeth Welch is minister at Clapton Park United Reformed Church, Hackney, London.

Information

Gregory of Nyssa was born at Caesarea in what is now Turkey around the year 330 and died in the year 394. He was one of the three 'Cappadocian Fathers', along with his brother Basil and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus. He was introduced to the spiritual life by his elder sister Macrina who exercised a formative influence upon him, particularly in terms of her ascetic and Scriptural focus. It was she who, after the death of their father, converted the household into a monastery and convent on one of the family estates. The three siblings and their friend are now sometimes referred to as the 'Cappadocian four', giving an indication of the mutual influence that each one had in the development of the theological and spiritual life of their day. They shared a concern for the the Holy Trinity, raising up the role of the Holy Spirit in the threefold life of God, and thus in the life of the church and the Christian. In the year 379 both Gregory's brother Basil and his sister Macrina died, and this deeply affected him; but out of this darkness emerged a profound spirituality. For Gregory,

Wednesday 18th July Titus 3: 9-11

The Rev'd George Watt is Minister of Reigate Park Church

Reading

But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.

Reflection

Being a parent teaches you some valuable lessons. Something I have learned is that you need to choose your 'battles.' Otherwise family life becomes one confrontation after another and there are never any winners. There are some issues which are so much more important than others but even these need to be dealt with constructively and not become a head-to-head clash. That's a lesson to be learned in the church family too.

How many of us have been in meetings where there have been pointless controversies and arguments? Here's a thought for those meetings. In addition to voting cards and the orange and blue cards for consensus decision making we could be issued with 'red herring' cards so that we can show that we are getting embroiled in pointless discussion. It would indicate that we want to move on to much more important matters. The challenge of course is that what seems trivial to me might be very important to others and vice versa.

We should examine ourselves and not be the cause of senseless arguments and especially avoid being the one who causes division which has serious consequences. It takes a great deal of grace to back down. Not that we can't have differences. But our calling is to build up the body of Christ not divide it. We need to learn to disagree well. And

with David and Saul, Abraham and Sarah included in it, but among all those names one name, and one name alone, stood out – the name of God. That name expressed the essence and heart of God and the Psalmist is desperate to connect with that reality.

This Psalm moves us from lament over the cruelty and ruthlessness of humanity to an awareness of our own vulnerability and need. But more than that it connects us with the reality of God as the one and only saviour. It begins with the desperate plea, 'Save me, O God, by your name' and then leads us to a place of assurance, with the phrases, 'God is my help' and 'the Lord upholds my way'. The personal tone deepens as the Psalmist turns from describing God's ways to speaking to God directly, thankfully praying 'you, O Lord, have rescued me'.

In all this, the goodness of God is underlined and this in turn leads onto an offering of praise and thanksgiving. God's name is not an oppressive one, stirring up fear or guilt. Instead God's name rescues, liberates and lifts up the oppressed. May God's name be praised.

Name above all names, we praise you.

The I am of all time, we praise you.

The One named in the child Jesus, we praise you.

The One who is good above all good, we praise you.

The One who brings justice to the oppressed, we praise you.

The one whose victory we glimpse, we praise you.

Name above all names, we praise you.

Monday 9th July Titus 2: 1-2

The Rev'd Helen M Mee is minister both in Granton United Church, Edinburgh and Carlisle URC and is the Retiring Convenor of the URC Equalities Committee

Reading

But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

Reflection

This shortest of short passages raises many questions and challenging ideas for me, not least is how to address them in a short reflection.

Just how might we identify what is sound doctrine or what might be consistent with it?

Then follows the challenge, for me, that it is to the older men that the responsibility for championing ethical and moral behaviours is given. I baulk at the comparison between such responsibilities and those we shall see proffered to other groupings in society.

This does not seem to fit with Jesus' teaching about God's realm or his modelled behaviour which is inclusive of all those diversities in his circle which we can identify. (Some will be hidden or invisible).

There are signs of inclusion in the Epistle too. Titus himself, Paul's proven trusted colleague over a number of years, did not come from a Jewish background thus representing a tension between those who might be seen to belong to and be part of the once prevailing culture and norms and those who might bring new and differing perspectives. Titus, in terms of the regard in which he is held by Paul, represents the value of embracing change, tolerance and the celebration of diversity.

Sound doctrine, for me, is disclosed in behaviour which is Christlike – scripturally-based, challenging but welcoming and open to persuasion. Sound doctrine demonstrates a gentle strength and discloses love in action and does not seem to me the exclusive prerogative of any segment of humankind.

All of the above may be true, yet none of us can achieve acceptability before God on our own, it is all down to God and is purely and simply a gift of God's grace and mercy. It is in no way dependent on what we do; indeed, there is nothing we can do to earn this.

That can be hard for us to understand when we live in a world which tells us if you work hard enough you'll get your reward or, you don't get anything in this life for free - yet it turns out we do!

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the loving kindness of God is poured out; we are transformed, and we respond, that is why we do good works; not to earn anything but as a response to what we have been given – they are if you like our thank you letters.

We may think what we do is not enough, not worthy of what God has done for us, yet as my old prep school teacher used to say, 'God loves a trier'.

Prayer

Saving God,
we offer you our thanks and praise for your great gift of eternal life,
through Christ Jesus our Lord.

When the daily callings and responsibilities of life get on top of us;
when we aim for perfection and fall short; when it often seems
pointless and we wonder why we bother. Remind us, that although
all we do can never be enough to thank you, in your eyes our very
striving is enough. Amen

Prayer

Living God, you place reminders of your goodness before us if we but look to see them.

Through the example of Jesus, our fellow travellers on his Way, and the actions of your Spirit in the world, you encourage us to lead faithful and loving lives.

Yet we still stumble and need to be reminded of your goodness before we turn in on ourselves, forgetting your invitation to renewal.

May Your goodness, mercy and love be present this day. Amen

Tuesday 17th July Titus 3: 6-8

The Rev'd Branwen Rees, East Wales Regional Minister

Reading

This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.

Reflection

Wow, for just three short verses, there is an awful lot packed in, pretty much a summary of the Gospel – hope, justification by grace, heirs, eternal life, not to mention that old chestnut, good works.

But why do we do 'good works'? Because it's the right thing to do; we feel we ought to or because it will earn us a reward?

My sense that sound doctrine has more to do with being than knowing, more pastoral than didactic, is growing. So whilst I covet the gifts of articulation and dialogical discourse my intuition is inclined to value the, perhaps softer, fruits of the Spirit as listed in a well known song mnemonic "the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self control"

Prayer

God in Trinity, holy in one
lead us through the mazes and tanglewood of our own construction
following the paths you have laid for us
may we recognise our sisters and brothers not necessarily by words
but actions Amen

Tuesday 10th July Titus 2: 3-5

The Rev'd Lis Mullen, retired minister, member of Kendal URC

Reading

Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.

Reflection

The writer of this 'instruction leaflet' is certainly going through a long list of who should do what and how, so that Titus, as leader of the new and struggling Christian community in Crete has definite guidelines on how Christians could stand out in the community in which they live and work.

Having told the old men how to behave, it is now the turn of older women. I am an 'older woman' – though it comes as a shock to think of myself in that way and I'm usually in denial! Nevertheless, I want to ask how we 'older women' feel about the instructions given for our behaviour? Is it relevant for us today?

I'm not sure about reverent behaviour – in fact I tend to agree with Jennie Joseph who wrote: 'When I am old I shall wear purple, with a red hat that doesn't go, and doesn't suit me....and I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves.....I shall run my stick along the public railings and make up for the sobriety of my youth.....'

But one of the things we women need is a good chat. To have a gossip. It's good to share news and views but there's a thin line between gossiping with someone and about someone else. Oh dear, I know I fall short on that one.... What about you?

The one that gets me at the core of my being is the exhortation to encourage the young women. As a grandmother, I would love to be able to encourage young parents how to deal more appropriately with their children and how my daughters-in-law should care for my sons! I know, however, such wisdom would not be appreciated, welcomed or appropriate.

Perhaps more apt advice to us older women could be: have fun, keep friends and love the next generations just as God loves us.

Prayer

Thank you for the wisdom that comes with age
the freedom to play and rest
and the choice of how to spend time.
Thank you for the wisdom of younger people
who grow and develop new approaches
and teach us older ones a thing or two!

any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Reflection

When I read through this reading I can't help but hear an echo of Luke's telling of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. (Luke 18: 9-14) The Pharisee taking centre-stage and, in a not so quiet voice, declaring 'God, I thank you that I am righteousness and not foolish, disobedient, led astray, a slave to various passions and pleasures, prone to passing my days in malice and envy, being despicable, or hating others like those people.' And then in a quiet dimly lit corner, facing the wall, the tax-collector mumbling 'God, I give thanks for your loving-kindness and mercy, your free gift of rebirth and renewal, and the example of Christ to follow even though I keep stumbling along the way.'

The writer of this letter isn't using this list in this way though. They are encouraging positive behaviour, not the humiliation of others. The writer is acknowledging that both they, and the recipients of the letter, had previously led very imperfect lives but that now, through no action of theirs and completely reliant on the grace of God, they are now saved from such lives.

They may well be saved, but you don't bother writing a letter in the ancient world if everything is rosy. Probably the writer has heard that people within the community that Titus gathers together are behaving in such ways, or like the Pharisee in the parable. The letter is sent to encourage them that God is good, loving and merciful, and the opportunity to change is present within every moment. God has saved them and them being prudent, obedient, faithful, self-controlled, kind, generous, admirable, and loving is not a condition of that liberation but a loving response to it.

Is Psalm 55 about bullying? Some think it is David, feeling tormented by his son or his predecessor. Who knows? But in the writer's dis-ease, 'anguish grips my heart'. As if being hounded by a hawk, the Psalmist longs for the wings of a dove, to fly away to hiding and rest.

Mendelssohn set verse six to a haunting melody. Ironically, I had to sing it in Assembly. Looking straight at those who ragged me, I sang, 'far away would I roam'. It's sheer poetry – a prayer to God for help - and the singing of it was enough to strengthen and encourage me, so that I need not fly away, but find in God's faithful presence all I needed to hang in there until teasers became friends, which some of them remain. When we really are bullied, though, we may need to get out of the way; it would be folly not to do so. All the more reason then prayerfully to open ourselves to God, perhaps with St Teresa of Avila:

Prayer

Nothing distress you, nothing affright you,
everything passes, God will abide.
Love in due measure measureless Goodness;
patient endeavour, run to Love's call!
Faith burning brightly be your soul's shelter;
who hopes, believing, accomplishes all. (RS 548)

Monday 16th July Titus 3: 3 - 5

The Rev'd David Coaker is minister of Grays URC and a chaplain to Moderators of General Assembly

Reading

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of

Forgive us when we fail to live up to the standards set for us and help us to be gracious and accepting of difference. Amen

Wednesday 11th July Titus 2: 6-8

The Rev'd Richard Church is a member of Streatham URC and serves as Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).

Reading

Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

Reflection

When Dr Billy Graham died, full of years, the news was full of his integrity in his relationships and in his care in the way he used money. He understood that the message had to be modelled by the messenger. He answered every letter, even when it was from those who disagreed with his ministry. He faced disagreement with dignity. He made mistakes of course, but apologised for them. His intention was to avoid the Gospel being brought into disrepute by his words or actions.

This section of the letter to Titus concerns itself with pastoral advice on how to live as a community of Christ's people. The rashness of young men is known to the writer and therefore he counsels self control. Thus healthy community rests on each section of the community having concern for the others, rather than simply giving way to the impulse of the moment.

Lord,

In Jesus we see the Word centred life.

May our words and actions point beyond ourselves.

Deliver us from hasty speech and shallow judgements.
By your spirit, grant us wisdom,
Enable us to face opponents with grace
And model good works unselfconsciously,
For your name's sake, Amen

Thursday 12th July Titus 2: 9-10

The Rev'd Ruth Whitehead is a member of Taunton URC and currently serves as South Western Synod Moderator.

Reading

Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to answer back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Reflection

I was horrified to learn that in 1791, when a bill to abolish the slave trade lost in the House of Commons, Church bells rang out in celebration. This piece of Scripture is a real challenge.

At the time that it was written, perhaps, a third of people in the Roman world were slaves. Many were born into slavery – members of an underclass who were often treated more as animals than as people. Yet this letter to Titus seems to tell them to accept their lot.

Perhaps it helps to hear in these verses an echo of Romans 12: 1 “..present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God..”. Just as the Christian lives to serve God, so the Christian slave lives to serve others, but always as a child of God, with choice and dignity.

Maybe the best we can do is to see these verses as a reminder that what is true for those slaves is true for all of us. “You might be the only Jesus someone ever sees” may seem like a faded old preacher's

2 My anxious thoughts make me distraught;
O hear and answer me.

3 I'm troubled by the voice of foes,
by their malicious stare;
For they bring suffering to me—
their hatred I must bear.

4 Within me anguish grips my heart;
death's terrors have come near.
5 I tremble and am terrified;
I'm overwhelmed by fear.

6 “O that I, like a dove, had wings!
Then I would fly away
7 And be at rest; I'd flee from here
and in the desert stay.

8 “Then would I to my hiding-place
for refuge take my flight,
Far from the raging of the storm
and from the tempest's might.”

Reflection

Ever felt bullied? I haven't really, but at school I hated the teasing. They mocked my accent, straight back and treble solos in Assembly. Dad said it was character-forming, but I still loathe teasing. True bullying, though, is harrowing, undermining confidence, damaging self-esteem, eroding equilibrium, even making life seem no worthless. It's not uncommon – at school, at work, at home – and all the more insidious when in a passive aggressive disguise, masquerading as silence, over-politeness, or those surreptitious glances that can so disarm us.

Our obedience, then, is not towards the 'rulers and authorities' – although we are to be subject to them – but to follow the commands of God in our dealings with the world. In a letter of commands for faithful living, Titus gives us some things that would help us in our obedience to God, as we live out our lives as honest disciples in the civic society. We may believe that civil authorities are to serve God's 'justice and peace', but Titus reminds us that justice, courtesy, gentleness and peace are also for us to observe.

Each time we think about making changes to our church – not to step away from state interference, but to our local worship, synod policies, or denominational structures – we find ourselves in quarrels, disputes and conflicts, and yet we do so, apparently, to be in ever closer obedience to God. Is this a contradiction we can ever resolve?

Prayer

In our obedience to you,
help us to respond not with schism and quarrel
but in gentleness and courtesy.
In our obedience to you,
help us not to be blinkered by our own view
but open to the richness of the world around.
In our obedience to you,
help us as we seek to be renewed by your Spirit,
to live out your commands,
and to be transformed as faithful disciples,
walking your way. Amen.

[Sunday 15th July Psalm 55: 1-8](#)

The Revd Nigel Uden, is a minister serving in Cambridge and as a Moderator of the General Assembly

1 O God, please listen to my prayer;
do not ignore my plea.

phrase, but how those of us who call ourselves 'Christian' behave can have a lasting impact on the people around us.

This is a verse of its time, not our time. Perhaps that is all we need to say.

And yet how to defeat evil and how to be good surely belong together. As we fight against the horrors of injustice, we do well to remember both that our behaviour should bring glory to God, and that those for whom we fight are worthy of being treated with dignity and not merely as those to be helped by us.

We need to fight against slavery and all injustice in our world. We also need to act as those whose lives glorify God.

God of justice, give us eyes to see the needs of our world
and courage to fight where there is evil.
Yet give us, too, grace to serve others
as we would serve you,
and to treat each person as your beloved child, as Jesus did. Amen.

[Friday 13th July Titus 2: 11-15](#)

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is minister of Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton URCs in the Synod of Scotland's Southside Cluster.

Reading

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

Reflection

The writer encourages his reader to live a counter-cultural life. A direct assault on the power structures of Empire would have been doomed. Instead the writer focuses on inner attitudes which would, if exhibited, subvert empire and transform the world. In a culture where the elite, at least, had unimaginable luxury and every whim, and vice, could be indulged from the enslavement of others the virtue of self-control would have been counter-cultural indeed. In a culture where values had to bend with the political reality of the current emperor - some of whom were out of control - the virtue of living an upright life would have been counter-cultural indeed. In an age where lip service was paid to the imperial cut but where many of the elite were functionally atheist the virtue of a godly life would have been counter cultural indeed.

Christian values eventually played their part in the fall of the Roman Empire - an economy based on slavery won't last when people insist there is no different between slave and free. Several early bishops of Rome were, themselves, slaves - so the social order was subverted.

Looking back and seeing how things were, and how they were subverted, is much easier than analysing our own world and seeing how God may be calling us to be counter-cultural. Maybe the writer's advice is still useful - self control in an age of excess still speaks of the One who calls us to live more simply so that others may simply live. Political expediency still seems the order of the day - which in part explains why politicians who seem upright - sincere are given a fair hearing wherever they are on the left-right spectrum. Genuine godliness is still attractive in an age where all truths are deemed equal.

We won't challenge our world order directly but, like those early Christians, we can embody the values of the Kingdom of Go which subvert the powers and principalities of our own age.

Lord Jesus, you overturned the tables, upset the religious, and threatened the powerful;
help us to live self controlled, upright and Godly lives,
that we may play our part in changing our world
as we long for the coming of your Kingdom. Amen

[Saturday 14th July Titus 3: 1-2](#)

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Prevett, Minister, St Andrew's URC, Monkseaton and Northern Synod.

Reading

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

Reflection

One of the 'spine-tingling' moments of the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church, used in our services of ordination and induction, has always been, for me, the assertion that 'In things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head.'

We stand in a long line of those who chose not to conform to the church established by law – including those who walked away (at immense personal costs) from their livings – to stand up for their belief in a Church that was free of state interference. Importantly, this wasn't (and isn't!) anti-government (or even anti-monarchy) but was a statement that obedience to God required freedom from the trappings of a state religion, recognising that it is the role of civil authorities to serve 'God's will of justice and peace for all humankind'.