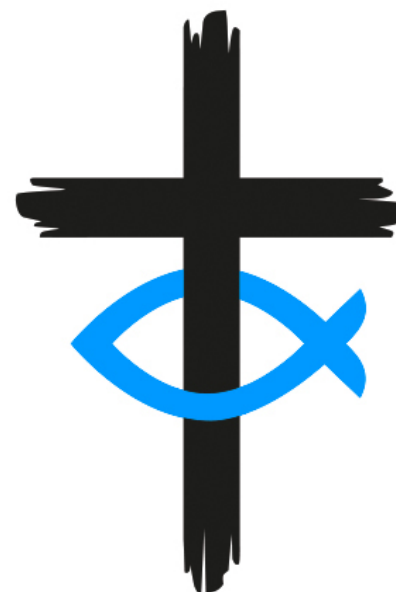


Daily Devotions from the URC
The Letter to the Romans (2)



Sunday 1st – Saturday 15th September

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[Sunday 1st September Psalm 112](#)

The Revd Nigel Uden, Downing Place URC, Fulbourn URC and Stetchworth & Cheveley URC in Cambridgeshire and a Moderator of the General Assembly

1 Praise God! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD
And finds delight in following his word.

2 His children will be mighty in the land;
His line will know the blessing of God's hand.

3 Riches and wealth within his house are found;
His righteousness for ever will abound.

4 The man who stands for mercy, truth and right
Will find the darkness turn to morning light.

written in the Law, but on the other hand did have issues with the way in which it was being interpreted and applied by the scribes and Pharisees. In Jesus' time, it would seem that its application was as much about social control by the Sanhedrin, thus keeping the Roman authorities happy, than being aware of the nature of a meaningful relationship with God.

Paul reminds the Church that it was Jesus' death and resurrection that brought about a new relationship between God and the believer rather than adherence to a set of rules in order to have a closer relationship with God. That description 'believer' is the key to that different kind of relationship with God. No matter how much we have struggled to find a meaningful relationship with God, He always welcomes us back home just as the father did with his prodigal son. Our salvation from the power of sin was brought about by Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection rather than adherence to a set of rules – Hallelujah.

Prayer

Redeeming God, so often we feel that we can only function by following a set of rules, forgetting that it is through faith in your redeeming love that we receive forgiveness for our weakness and sins. Open our minds to the truth and magnitude of Your love for all, through Jesus our Risen Lord. Amen

bowing before you seeking forgiveness,
trusting in your love and mercy,
looking to all that you have done in Jesus.
Shape us into your people,
fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit,
help us to love you with all that we are,
faithfully walking the way of Jesus
today and every day. Amen

Saturday 14th September

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

Romans 10: 1-4

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Reflection

Have you ever broken the law? You might well reply "Yes, but not intentionally." Law can be very exacting and complicated, I know this from the experience of working in a Crown Court for some years. Often laws are amended but the new slant on any particular law is not always adequately publicized resulting in people being caught out. When you consider that the vast majority of people in Paul's era were illiterate, it raises the question what chance did they have in understanding the Law. The Jewish Law, the Torah, was very precise but its interpretation had been complicated by the Scribes with their own interpretation of what the Law meant. Paul, like Jesus, had no problems with what was

5 Good is the man who gives and freely lends;
To his affairs with justice he attends.

6 Surely a righteous man will stand secure;
His memory for ever will endure.

7 Though bad news comes, he will not be afraid;
His heart is firm; he trusts the LORD for aid.

8 He will not be alarmed, his heart holds fast;
He'll view his foes in triumph at the last.

9 He freely shares his riches with the poor;
His righteousness for ever will endure.
The LORD himself exalts his servant's name;
He gives him strength and dignity and fame.

10 The wicked, seeing this, will feel dismay;
He'll gnash his teeth and soon will waste away.
The wicked and their dreams will come to nought;
They never will enjoy what they have sought.

Reflection

Reading this Psalm, I'm struck that our version uses 28 male pronouns, for either God or a person - it's in the singular, about individuals. Let's keep travelling along the road toward inclusive language. Witness Brian Wren: '... that "man" originally meant "a human being", male or female or "humankind as a whole" is irrelevant if it no longer conveys those meanings unambiguously.'

But then I lingered at verse 7: 'Though bad news comes, [the righteous] will not be afraid...'. Really? If, as Psalms 111 and 112 suggest, a righteous person is one who keeps the commandments of God, can we unfailingly claim that they will not be afraid? Well, if righteousness is just about narrowly, anxiously obeying some rules, then there is little

evidence that such a righteous one is exempt from fear. Real fear can be a visceral thing – a discombobulating gut-wrenching, not least when breaking the law or feeling that life is spinning out of control. Often, all that eases fear is someone else’s companionship – their walking with us through the ‘bad news’. Is that what this Psalmist means?

Alternatively, the commandments can be seen as about our relationship with God, and with each other. To keep the commandments – like practising justice, caring for the poor - nourishes our trust in God and our confidence in those around us. Thus could it be that ‘when bad news comes’ the righteous - the one who finds God’s grace in the commandments – is indeed less afraid? Maybe that is why the hymn, Abide with me, means so much to us. We sing it when bad news comes; it is our reaching out for the hand of God in the risen Christ, who so reliably, so resiliently walks with us. ‘I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless.’

Prayer

Eternal God, we come seeking you,
but not to test you, nor, in finding you,
to bind you to an image or a gesture.
We need from you no tricks to prove you exist.
No miracles.
Just a clearer sense of your love,
by which, walking with you as our companion,
we are freed from fear,
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

after a poem of Rainer Maria Rilke

Now there’s a sentence to ponder!

The original sin in the Garden of Eden was Adam and Eve thinking they knew better than God. They wanted God’s position, God’s authority to decide what was right and what was wrong. In this regard, very little has changed. Still, we have ideas well above our station. Still, we think we know best. Still, we argue with God and God’s word. Still, we make pronouncements as to what God does and doesn’t allow or approve of.

The hard truth is that God is the potter and we are the clay. Not the other way round. We need to let God be God, rather than creating a god in our own image. We need to hear God’s word and let it challenge our twenty-first century Western notions of what’s right and wrong. We need to let God shape and mould us into the people God longs for us to be... however uncomfortable that may be.

There is an apocryphal tale told about the brilliant Renaissance artist Michelangelo. Michelangelo was asked about the difficulties that he must have encountered in sculpting his huge masterpiece David. But he replied with an unassuming description of his creative process: “It is easy. You just chip away the stone that doesn’t look like David.”

Are we prepared to let God chip away at us: at our sin, our self-righteousness, and our desire to be in charge? Are we prepared to be shaped into humble lovers of God?

When we do, it’s liberating. I don’t have to be in control. I don’t have to ‘save’ myself or anyone else through my good works. I don’t have to be God, for that position is already taken.

Prayer

Great and glorious God,
You are the Potter - we are the clay: we often forget that.
We confess our sin, self-righteousness, and hard-heartedness,

order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea,

‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people”,
and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved”.’
‘And in the very place where it was said to them, “You are not my people”,
there they shall be called children of the living God.’

And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, ‘Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively.’ And as Isaiah predicted,

‘If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us,
we would have fared like Sodom
and been made like Gomorrah.’

What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling-stone, as it is written,

‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

Reflection

“...who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?” (v.20)

Monday 2nd September

Fay Rowland, graduate student, Wesley House Cambridge, St Botolphs, Northants

Romans 6: 15 - 23

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection

Come with me to the land of my nightmares. Marmite is discovered to be a wonder-food. (If you like Marmite, pretend with me that you don't.) More than just packed with B-vitamins, Marmite heals all ills, ends war, solves global warming and even cures the common cold! Eat Marmite and I'll never die! Amazing - but I hate it. A law is passed that everyone must eat Marmite every day. Blergh. But it's the law, so I

grudgingly shove down the minimum I can get away with and wash away the taste with chocolate.

And then the law is repealed! Huzzah! I am free. No more Marmite for me! But freedom from Marmite mean freedom from its life-giving benefits. The law was designed to bring life, and what I think of as my freedom is actually killing me! Not because anyone is making me die, that's just how it is without Marmite.

Sigh. If only Marmite were chocolate! If chocolate were the cure-all, which by law I had to eat every day, I'd happily obey. If the law were repealed, I'd still eat, because that law would be in my heart.

That is what God has done for us in Jesus. The Law that was written on stone and made us aware of sin, leading to death, is now written on our hearts and leads to life. Marmite becomes chocolate and we are "obedient from the heart". We are free from the Law, (Paul poses the question), so should we now abandon it? "No way!" he exclaims. The gift of God is the miracle of turning Marmite into chocolate - putting the law in our hearts so that we obey from love, not duty, and gladly follow the path to eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To think about: Does it matter what we do, since we are not under law but under grace? Why?

Prayer

Generous God, you redeem us from the debts that we have earned, and give us freely what we have not worked for.
You rescue us from the road to destruction,
and set our feet on the path to life.
You free us from the chains that we ourselves have forged,
and adopt us into your family as beloved children.
Blessed be your name forever. Amen

obedience. As the theologian Karl Barth put it, the real risk is "disobedient exclusion from the benefit of the Gospel". When my energy goes into wondering why God did not make everybody else like me, I can easily miss that it is me God really wants to remould. For the Gospel to give me life in all its fulness, it may need change starting with me.

And more of that in tomorrow's reflection.

Prayer

Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
forgive me when I expect you to privilege me over others,
give me the humility to see you at work
even in those I find hard to trust,
help me to celebrate all those you have given me
as companions on the Way,
change me into the person you want me to be,
and do it all with mercy Amen

[Friday 13th September](#)

The Rev'd Matt Stone, Minister, Herringthorpe United Reformed Church, Rotherham

Romans 9: 19 - 32

You will say to me then, 'Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; and what if he has done so in

‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’

So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.’ So then he has mercy on whomsoever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses.

Reflection

After the mountain top confidence of Chapter 8, Paul suddenly seems consumed by anguish. You probably did not wake up this morning worrying about Abraham’s family politics and might even be tempted to join those who suggest Romans would be a better read if Chapters 9-11 were quietly removed.

Or you might have seen enough of Church life to be struck by how pertinent the question of who is being steered by God remains. Full of Chapter 8 confidence, we rejoice in God leading his people forward, only to find the Elders’ Meeting cannot agree amongst themselves. If we are all within God’s Covenant should Esau expect to defer to Jacob, and Ellie expect to defer to Jane? Has God chosen to use Ellie or Jane to explain the divine will? If “them at Synod” do not share our enthusiasm for our building project, who is being inspired by God? Then Paul disturbingly lobs in the even more tricky idea that God might choose to use Pharaoh, who never darkens the door of the synagogue and is the epitome of everything about the powerful that the United Reformed Church likes to condemn. Paul thinks God has to be allowed to work as God wills.

That may not be how we would play God, especially if we have the task of chairing that Elders’ Meeting. However, Paul’s conclusion is not that we beat down those who think God has steered them in a different way from us. Rather he will develop an argument that is around

Tuesday 3rd September

John Collings, Lay Preacher, Rutherglen URC

Romans 7: 1-6

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

Reflection

Paul reflects on the way life changes as circumstances change. He is writing to knowledgeable people who understand the Law. They had been bound by the Law and he wants them to understand how their lives had changed. The biggest change in our relationship with God was the life on earth of His son Jesus.

We have been freed from the old Law so we may bear fruit for God. What sort of fruit do we bear? As I look out of my window, I can now see apples, pears and plums growing in my garden, it is perfectly clear which is which. A few months ago as I looked at the blossom it was

impossible for me to tell what would come from the trees. If I was an expert gardener, I'd been able to tell the difference, but I am not an expert.

Is it clear to those around what fruit you bear for God? We can look at Christians labouring worldwide with organisations such as Christian Aid and know that they bear the fruit of loving service. We see many of our churches supporting Christian Aid through their links with Commitment for Life. What a wonderful name for a movement, we should all be committed to living our lives for Jesus.

We do our service not because we are forced to do it by laws and fear of retribution, but because we are freed from the captivity of the law and able to flourish as we enjoy our new life in the Spirit.

We are walking the way, living the life of Jesus today as we allow God to flourish in our lives, not as slaves but as free people who can rejoice as we know that we have freedom that Jesus earned for us.

Prayer.

Loving God

I thank you for Jesus,

I thank you that through His sacrifice I am freed from the old laws.

You loved me before I knew you.

You gave the gift of Your Son while we were separated by my sin.

Help me to enjoy my life in Jesus

Help me to bear fruit and share this wonderful life with others.

Enable me to be a fruitful Christian in the world today

Amen

Thursday 12th September

John Ellis, Past Moderator of the URC General Assembly and Secretary of Capel United Church in Kent

Romans 9: 1-18

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. For this is what the promise said, 'About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.' Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call) she was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written,

'I have loved Jacob,
but I have hated Esau.'

What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses,

and off she skipped, leaving Mummy astonished at the wisdom of someone not yet four!

It is beyond us. What can we say, Paul asks, that will truly convey the nature of God as we know God in Jesus? God who is for us, who embraces us with a father's love; Jesus, God's Son, our brother who knows what it is to be human, sharing our path from the manger to the cross – living still to represent humanity to God and God's love to humankind. Nothing in all creation we are assured, can separate us from this love that we know in Christ. All that life or death can throw at us is powerless against it.

Do we really believe it, though, and act on it? Most of us rarely experience hardship, distress, famine, persecution, and the rest, and we are grateful for that. But in many places at home and abroad people of faith (or no faith) suffer in many of these ways. So many that it seems impossible that anything we can do will make a difference, so, often, we feel powerless and do nothing. Yet it is only in sharing the unconquerable love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord that we will know in our hearts and in our lives the reality of that love. Love must be embodied, to be real. My four-year-old had it right: where there is love is where God is found.

Prayer

All-embracing God,
Your love is beyond measure.
It surrounds us and supports us and never fails
even when nailed to a cross.
Our love is uneasy and often falters at
the first obstacle, or fades as time passes.
Forgive us when we are afraid to love
for it is when we find love for others
that we find you, Lover of All. Amen

Wednesday 4th September

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

Romans 7: 7 - 13

What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Reflection

Here we are in the liminal state between sin and law. Where boundaries which seem clear dissolve the closer one tries to define them. Where thresholds which seem to delineate transitions shift like the sands of the sea. Where the more one tries to pin things down, the further apart they seem to move.

Although Barth might claim "the law is quite obviously the point at which sin becomes an observable fact of experience" and "law brings all human possibility into the clear light of an all-embracing [contest]", everyday life is much more messy. It does not matter whether we are contemplating the Old Testament statement of the Law or statute law in England (or elsewhere), behaviour that might be considered sinful

may not be illegal and things which are lawful could be regarded as sinful.

It is clear that matters of behaviour, personal conduct and attitude which the “standard” Christian of 1919 would have considered as “obviously” sinful are for many Christians of 2019 matters of personal choice. And vice versa.

It depends on the way one interprets the Bible as being the Word of God. In the URC we believe that “The highest authority for what we believe and do is God’s Word in the Bible alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit”. The help of the Spirit is vital in guiding us through liminal regions.

I have recently been working through a book of poems* in which a black man and a white woman respond to borders and boundaries experienced by refugees. One poem reminds us that

if what culture is
is different ways of seeing things
and what language is
is different ways of saying things
then the challenge is
to gather these
different ways to fight challenges.

For “culture” substitute “sin” and for “language” substitute “law” and then define the contest.

**The warriors who do not fight, Alison Phipps and Tawona Sitholé, Wild Goose Publications, 2018*

Wednesday 11th September

Heather Pencavel, Retired Minister, Thornbury URC

Romans 8: 31 - 39

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection

One afternoon long ago, helping me push the baby in the buggy, my daughter said in a thoughtful sort of voice, “You know God, Mummy?” “Yes dear” I said cautiously ... “Well I think, I think it’s all about love really, cos I love you and you love me – so God is here and ... and if I ran away all the way up there (pointing) and you stayed here – I would still love you, and you would still love me – so God would still be here!”

Reflection

In our weakness we often don't know how to pray. We look at the world and are tempted to despair. As I write I hear news stories of President Trump both pandering to racists and saying the most racist things I have ever heard a democratically elected leader say. The newly elected president of the European Commission has highlighted that 17,000 people have died on the Mediterranean Sea over the last five years as they fled oppression; she promises to make Europe's asylum systems more humane so that our borders don't remain places of despair and execution. In the UK, again as I write, the press is speculating who will be appointed to the cabinet as the Conservative leader changes letting someone else have a go at trying to simultaneously have and eat cake. In all this it's hard to know how to pray. We may pray that Mr Trump comes to his senses, that those who hear his words will use their anger to effect change; that (of course other) governments change their asylum policies; and that the great British public comes to its senses (but might have differing ideas about what that might look like).

In our own lives it's hard to know how to pray as we don't have the full picture. In a difficult personal context Paul wrote that we need not worry because, in our weakness God's Holy Spirit takes our prayers and makes them articulate. Our incoherent cries of rage and our impotent despair are transformed by the Holy Spirit (God within us) and made coherent and powerful before the throne of God above us.

Prayer

O God,
before you we sigh, moan and rage,
hear our inarticulate prayers,
and transform them into words of power
that we may be transformed
into powerful agents of change. Amen.

Prayer

God
you give us life
you give us discernment
you give us freedom
you give us courage
you forgive our sinfulness.

Give us strength
to navigate liminality
to plough through the messiness
to face the challenges
of sin and law. Amen

[Thursday 5th September](#)

The Rev'd Jacky Embrey, Moderator of the Mersey Synod

Romans 7: 14 - 25

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh
I am a slave to the law of sin.

Reflection

It can be a little unnerving to hear Paul talking in terms of not being able to do the good that he wants to do. It's usually others that he is taking to task for getting things wrong – whether it's the 'foolish Galatians' or the Corinthians that he 'does not commend'. Not only that, but he quite openly commands the Corinthians to 'be imitators of me, as I am of Christ'.

This is the man who said that if anyone had reason to be confident in the flesh, he had more. Yet, here Paul is saying that nothing good dwells in his flesh. This is clearly a heartfelt experience. The man who spends his whole life trying to live out his faith still struggles at times. He finds it impossible to practice what he preaches.

I, for one, am very glad to hear it, because that is the lived experience of anyone who preaches; indeed, of anyone who has the temerity to try to lead another in the ways of Christ, or even simply to walk the way for themselves. We keep getting things wrong.

Paul has two things to say to us, when we are struggling to walk the way. The first is that the reason that we find it so difficult is that 'sin dwells within' us. In other words, we're never going to get it right all the time, so we should not despair. It's ultimately not entirely our fault. (We could add: so long as we do our best!)

Secondly, Paul says, 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord'. That's because (as we'll hear tomorrow) Jesus has dealt with sin and we will not ultimately be condemned.

firm intention for the glorious freedom of all things. In such realisation we find hope, and in and by such divinely inspired hope we are saved.

Prayer

Gracious God,
even amidst futility and decay,
give us a vision of your glorious freedom;
for ourselves,
for others,
for your world.
And give us hope
so that we may continue to work towards it. Amen.

Tuesday 10th September

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is a minister in the Synod of Scotland's Southside Cluster working with four churches in and around Glasgow. He also co-ordinates the Daily Devotions from the URC project.

Romans 8.26-30

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Reflection

I would need to have greater experience of suffering before stating so confidently to others, 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.'

Of course, it's Paul who says it, and he knew more about suffering than I do. Beaten, rejected and imprisoned on more than one occasion, he was, most likely, executed on account of his faith in Jesus. And Jesus certainly knew what it was to suffer.

Yet Paul has the vision to connect his personal suffering, and Jesus's sufferings, with the big picture. Yes, currently, everything is caught up in futility and decay, but (and it's a big 'but') this is with Creation's glorious freedom always in view and always intended.

Believing that current suffering will give way to glorious freedom does not arise from a careful calculation of our current circumstances. Whether we're pondering experiences of personal suffering or the prospects for a planet ravaged by humanly caused climate change, matters in themselves are too complex, and often the details too depressing, for us to foresee the future with clarity or with sunny optimism.

Instead, along with Paul, we hope for what we do not see. We work towards that for which we hope – individual joy, renewed relationships, a flourishing planet. We continue to do so, even when we struggle and 'groan', sometimes wondering if we will ever achieve these things.

What will keep us going in such unpromising circumstances? It's recognising that our best actions are actually a joining-in with God's

So let's carry on doing our best to walk the way, in the full knowledge that we are asking the impossible of ourselves, but that God has it covered, when we get things wrong.

Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer

Living God, You know each of us, better than we know ourselves. You know when we struggle to walk your way and you know when we are not trying as hard as we could. Thank you that you have dealt with our failure; that we are not condemned. Help us to walk each day a little closer to your path. For you are the way, Amen.

[Friday 6th September](#)

Verena Walder, Lay Preacher and Elder, Tabernacle URC, Mumbles

Romans 8: 1 - 8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit[a] of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Reflection

Although these verses are full of release they may cause us inner conflict, perhaps even feeling like a bit of a damper at times; bringing us into the sense of condemnation, which we are told we are no longer subject to. They can come across as being very different to a lot of things that are commonplace in the places of worship of which we are a part, and where we seek to serve our Lord. It does however reflect in clear terms the immensity of just HOW greatly Jesus has set us free in a way in which nobody else has been able to.

We no longer live under the Law with its restrictions, dictates and stranglehold sense of needing to adhere to the “straight and narrow.” The difference is that we are meant to live the life of the Spirit, and not be shackled to those things from the past which may well have dogged our steps. Very clearly we are told to walk in the Spirit, and not according to the flesh.

There needs to be a full realisation of the extent of such freedom into which Jesus has so wonderfully released us. Perhaps something that only the Holy Spirit can truly liberate us into, in His way and timing ridding us of the sense of condemnation. Jesus Himself reminds us that if we know the truth in Him we shall be free (John 8), and that is freedom with great emphasis, and eternal effect. However, such is only as good as the amount of freedom which we allow ourselves to enter into, and appropriate. It is not holding back, but embracing the fullness and the releasing effect of the life of the Spirit which Jesus, in His love for each one of us, longs for us to lay hold of and enjoy.

Prayer

Gracious Father!

What a gift you have given us!

Freedom from the confines of the law,

The manifesto promises belonging and citizenship, a discipleship of equals, in God’s basileia community and thus the call to praise.
Hallelujah!

Prayer

Hallelujah

Steadfast God,

God in Community holy in One,

you hold together glory with compassion for your peoples.

You model a passion for justice and love.

You are our God, there is none like you.

We are your kingdom people.

Early in the morning all creation wakes and is compelled to sing.

The blackbird joined by the robin and Jenny wren and then the finch

Praising you in a fourfold dawn chorus. Hallelujah

[Monday 9th September](#)

The Rev’d Trevor Jamison, Minister, St Columba’s United Reformed Church, North Shields

Romans 8: 18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for

Psalm is a call to praise. A call made to all God's people or indeed all creation to praise God.

The Psalm pivots on the central question (metaphorically and physically) Who can compare unto the LORD our God? It is a rhetorical question needing no answer other than the given description of God transcendent yet fully involved with God's creation. We see an outline of God's care for God's suffering people (hence its use within the Passover liturgy.)

The Psalm goes on to underline why we are called to praise. Called to praise because of the Kingship of God, a king with a preferential option for the poor.

In other words, explains the Psalm, we are called to praise God, because God not only has an equalities manifesto but is active in lifting the poor giving them a position amongst respected citizens.

“7 He from the dust doth raise the poor,
that very low doth lie;
And from the dunghill lifts the man
oppressed with poverty;

8 That he may highly him advance,
and with the princes set;
With those that of his people are
the chief, ev'n princes great.”

Of all potentially marginalised people barren women are also identified. The security of women was predicated on their roles in relation to men – daughters, wives, mothers. To be barren led to being outcast within the Israelite society.

and all of its heaviness.

Freedom from the condemnation which at times was too unwieldy to bear.

Freedom to walk according to the way which Jesus has prepared for us.

Freedom to set us free to be truly the people you ask us to be.

Freedom to be walking day by day, in your life and peace. Amen.

[Saturday 7th September](#)

Jo Patel, Wattisfield URC, Suffolk.

Romans 8: 9-17

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit[i] is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Reflection

These are powerful, life changing verses. What does it mean to be in the Spirit?

Verse 9 tells us we are no longer in the flesh but because of righteousness (being made right with God through Christ's death), we are 'life', we are alive in the Spirit. It has nothing to do with who we are or what we have done, but it is everything to do with Jesus and His sacrifice. The Spirit was in Jesus and raised him from death. It is exactly the same Spirit who now has taken up residence in our lives, because we believe. It is so simple to believe. It is not supposed to be hard. It is the easiest, least complicated mindset that we can choose to live. Choose to live these verses. Then, by the Holy Spirit within you, your body will move away from things that are not good for you and you will be led forwards into righteousness, holiness, healing, power, faith, trust and an unfathomable knowledge of who God is for you.

'Abba' is so much more than a substitute for the word father. In Aramaic it means it conveys a depth of devotion, endearment, longing-to-be-with cherishing that our English word cannot convey. To be a child of God is about belonging, a deep closeness, enfolding and being enveloped by God's never ending love. I heard recently that understanding God's love is like falling backwards into a great big pile of soft laundry that has just come out of the drier. Burying into the warm, comforting folds of soft sheets, which fill every inch of space around you, is like burying our lives into the heart of God. It's a great way to teach children to pray and physically feel how much they are loved. Maybe we should try it too? In childlike abandon, to dwell deeply on and fathom the mystery of what it means to live life in the Spirit.

Prayer

Abba! Right now I let myself fall into the comfort of your heart feeling the warmth and softness of your hold; the joy of knowing I am loved. There is no need to understand you, I just embrace the mystery of your love. I cherish you, Holy Spirit, your presence within me. Nurture, guide, sustain and energise me for the day ahead. Amen.

[Sunday 8th September Psalm 113](#)

The Rev'd Helen M Mee Synod of Scotland

1 Praise GOD: ye servants of the LORD, O praise, the LORD's name praise.	7 He from the dust doth raise the poor, that very low doth lie; And from the dunghill lifts the man oppressed with poverty;
2 Yea, blessèd be the name of GOD from this time forth always.	8 That he may highly him advance, and with the princes set; With those that of his people are the chief, ev'n princes great.
3 From rising sun to where it sets, GOD's name is to be praised.	9 The barren woman house to keep he maketh, and to be Of sons a mother full of joy. Praise to the LORD give ye.
4 Above all nations GOD is high, 'bove heav'ns his glory raised.	
5 Unto the LORD our God that dwells on high, who can compare? 6 Himself that humbleth things to see in heav'n and earth that are.	

Reflection

Psalm 113 is one of the Hallelujah Psalms (Psalms 111-118). It is also the first of a collection of six psalms (Psalms 113-118) that are known as the Egyptian Hallel and are used in the celebration of Passover. This