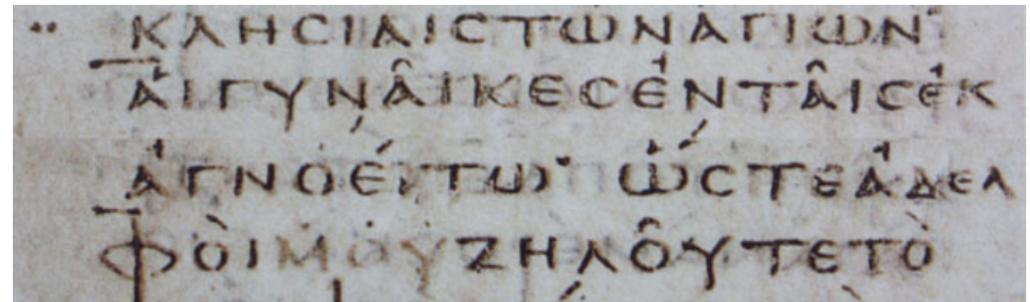


Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

2 Corinthians
part 1



Easter Monday – Saturday 25th April

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Introduction

We continue with our journey through Paul's letters to the Corinthian Church spending the next few weeks in what we know as 2 Corinthians. Whilst scholars are clear that Paul wrote the letter there is a view that it's a compilation of at least two letters which later editors merged into one due to the change of tone between chapter 7 and 8. The situation in the church was still complicated, Paul asserts his apostleship and clearly sees that he's been attacked. We know that church conflicts can be messy and those in leadership often take the brunt of the pain. The letter encourages us that even when we get it wrong we're in good company!

and downcast friend is a channel for God's consolation. Someone whose conversation then deepens that consolation, as balm to a wounded soul. Someone who knows joy in a job of reconciliation, and whose heart goes out to the aggrieved community as it extends a nervous and anxious welcome to this mediator.

We are in the season of Easter, with stories of the resurrection of the Lord fresh in our minds.

So it is right that we should be quietly yet boldly confident in God's power at work in us too to bring consolation, reconciliation and joy into painful situations. We cannot guarantee success. Such work also depends for its outcome on the attitudes of the others involved. God's power at work in us is not a magic wand. It does not ride roughshod over other people's sovereignty.

But, inspired by Titus' example, let's be on the lookout for God's call to console, encourage and build bridges between fractured communities and individuals.

Prayer

Thank you Lord that in your resurrection life
you are present to our race for healing and repair.
Summon us to attend to this work, which is Yours.

And if, today, we ourselves need help
to heal a rift or forgive a hurt,
send us a 'Titus', we pray. Amen

grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who was wronged, but in order that your zeal for us might be made known to you before God. In this we find comfort.

In addition to our own consolation, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you. For if I have been somewhat boastful about you to him, I was not disgraced; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well. And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling. I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

Reflection

Phew! Relief floods through the mind. There's been a substantial disagreement between a leader and a church, maybe even threatening a breakdown in their relationship. And now the person sent to help heal the rift has returned with an encouraging report.

Deep feelings of attachment on both sides are evident in today's reading. Paul for whom the Corinthian church is beloved. He often boasts about them. He has great pride in them. Whilst they, on their part, have spoken to Titus of their longing, their mourning and their zeal for Paul. It all speaks of passionate people within an emotionally expressive culture. It is Titus, though, who grabs my attention as I read this passage. I would like to be like Titus. Someone whose mere arrival alongside a troubled

Monday 13th April 2 Corinthians 1: 1 - 11

The Rev'd Terry Hinks, minister: Trinity, High Wycombe & Cores End URC

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many.

Reflection

So the solemnity of Lent is over; the emotions of Holy Week are past and we have arrived at Easter. Even the nation still recognises its importance (historically if nothing else) by granting us all a Bank Holiday. None of your VE Day Bank holiday nonsense, this is real victory - God's great victory over sin, evil and death, in raising the crucified one to life and

glory. 'Blessed be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...' indeed.

That brings to mind the words of 1 Peter 1.3, that famous verse: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' That seems a better verse for Easter Monday than getting stuck into Paul's second letter to that difficult church in Corinth that caused him such anguish.

But wait a minute...the risen Christ still bears the scars of the cross; the living hope is not some easy-going fantasy, looking always on the bright side of life. The living hope is forged in the cauldron of human suffering and divine sacrifice. It is hope at times in the face of hopelessness and despair, not optimism based on reasonable expectations. There is nothing reasonable or sentimental about Easter Day!

And so we come to Paul's heart aching letter, that speaks of being crushed and despairing of life and through it coming to rely on the God who raises the dead. The letter that will open Paul's hurt at his fellow Christians in Corinth and what they say about and do to each other and to him. Yet his hope in them is unshaken. Blessed by the God who brings us such amazing hope and consolation.

Prayer

Such grace and peace you show us Living God,
through the life and death and ever new life of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Such consolation, amid affliction; such hope, amid the strife;
unshaken hope for ourselves, for our churches, for our world.
Blessed be your name, name above all names.

living in, it doesn't call for total withdrawal.' Rather we're called to be in the world with all its complexities, joys and problems. As Paul reminds us elsewhere, God's people are not us, or people like us, but everyone, even the ones who disagree.

Prayer

Gracious God, we give thanks that you have called us to be among your people, and to be in the world.
Help us to remember that your love is for everyone,
and guide us to spread your values of peace and compassion,
and to care for everyone in our community, whatever they believe.
Amen.

[Saturday 25th April 2 Corinthians 7:](#)

The Rev'd Gwen Collins, retired minister, member of Avenue St Andrews URC

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

Make room in your hearts for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I often boast about you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction.

For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within. But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I

Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,
and I will be your father,
and you shall be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.'

Reflection

'I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' This is a beautiful verse, guaranteed to make us feel warm and fuzzy, because naturally we read it as being about us. We are God's people, and God is our God; God loves us all and we love God. All of which is wonderful good news that we should never forget. You might, however, sense that there is a 'but' coming.

Paul quotes these words to support an argument which, at the very least, we might find problematic today. 'Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.' Does that mean those of us in the Church should separate ourselves from everyone else? Paul asks 'what does an unbeliever share with a believer?' Well, there are plenty of things they might have in common, and to suggest that a Christian shares nothing with their non-Christian neighbours doesn't ring true. You may, like me, have neighbours, friends and family members who either follow other faith traditions or have no religion. I certainly know many wise, kind, and compassionate people not motivated by faith, who show more evidence of loving their neighbour than many Christians.

We as Christians are not cut off from the world, but part of it, and our churches are embedded in diverse local communities. Sometimes we may want to oppose the values of our society and challenge injustice, while on other issues (such as around sexuality and gender) the Church is behind and needs to catch up. To quote the song 'French Disko' by the band Stereolab, 'Though this world's essentially an absurd place to be

Tuesday 14th April 2 Corinthians 1: 12 - 24

The Rev'd John Durell, retired minister, member of Waddington Street URC, Durham

Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more towards you. For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end— as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.

Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favour; I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no' at the same time? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been 'Yes and No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment.

But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

Reflection

“There’s been a change of plan.” If you’re an organised sort of person, the heart sinks. Why can’t people stick to what’s already been arranged? For most of us life is complicated enough as it is, and we really want to know just where we are.

So we can guess the Corinthians’ sense of frustration as Paul’s travel plans seem to change yet again. His supporters will no doubt rejoice at the promise of a double visit, either side of his trip to Macedonia; but others it seems are asking if he’s going to stick with these plans or change them yet again. It’s no surprise then that Paul is quick to defend himself. But we would hardly expect a few comments on his own reliability to lead into so deep a reflection on the very nature of Christ. Paul recognises that we make plans by weighing up the consequences of our possible actions, saying ‘yes’ to some and ‘no’ to others. But once we ask God to be with us in the choices and decisions we make, our carefully nuanced “on the one hand this, and on the other hand that” thought processes no longer function. Paul believes that God has been with him in the plans he has made (even over matters such as should the journey be by sea or by land), and he is convinced that God never mixes up “yes” and “no”.

Central to Paul’s life, as the power and the inspiration behind his mission to sometimes awkward and obstreperous people like the Corinthians, is the person of Jesus Christ. And he, Paul declares, is the way in which God has said a resounding “Yes”. There’s no room for doubt, and no hint of change in God’s plans. In Jesus Christ, it is “Yes” all the way!

Prayer

Loving God, help me to be true to my word
and stick to the plans you have helped me to make
that even in my life others may see
the Christ who is your unfailing YES.

Hauerwas’s memorable phrase. At rock bottom we don’t belong however much part of us longs to belong. We are seeking a homeland but equally importantly encouraging others to journey on with us.

It is an urgent task to give people back the dignity with which God has endowed each one of us, to share a hope that extends beyond life on earth, and to have the joy of seeing people lay hold of this deeper life in the strength of the Jesus who has laid hold of us.

Prayer

Lord,
We hear the urgency of the task to proclaim your saving message.
Forgive our lethargy.
Deliver from despair those who are struggling with life either because of not having enough or having too much.
Create in us a pure heart, truthful speech and genuine love.
Today help us to open our hearts to those whom we encounter,
So that others may experience your presence, your promise and your purpose for their lives, Amen

[Friday 24th April - 2 Corinthians 6: 14 - 18](#)

The Rev’d Dr Nick Jones is minister of Heswall URC & St. George’s URC, Thornton Hough

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

‘I will live in them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people. 23

beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

Reflection

Now is the acceptable time!

It is hard to mistake the sense of urgency in Paul's appeal. The earlier emphasis in 5.20 on the 'go between' function of Christians as agents of reconciliation is a call to action for followers of the Prince of Peace. The Cross of Christ challenges this world's values to its very core. This is no time for Christian lives to be all about ease and comfort and self-focus or for that matter the life of our local churches. There is evidence all around us of a lostness. A celebrity culture that gives struggling people hope only to dash them down. An incipient violence fuelled by the way we speak about and to one another.

To be effective in this urgent work of proclaiming Christ, we need to have a regard to the obstacles in our own lives which might prevent work colleagues, friends and family members from themselves responding to God's call in Christ. We may not have as dramatic a set of circumstances as Paul detailed in verse 5 but with the daily inspiration of the Holy Spirit we can try to manifest authentic Christian living in our daily encounters. Those who choose Christ's way are 'resident aliens' to use Stanley

Wednesday 15th April 2 Corinthians 2: 1 - 11

The Rev'd Andy Braunston works with four churches in and around Glasgow.

So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you. For I wrote to you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent—not to exaggerate it—to all of you. This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Reflection

As a teenager I attended a neighbouring church's evening Folk Mass from time to time (this probably dates me). The excellent choir there sung a piece with the striking lyric: "what God asks of me can never be the same as what He asks of you so I must cause you pain." One of the difficult things in life is the realisation that, however, unwittingly we cause others pain - sometimes by our own sense of vocation and call, sometimes by the more mundane minutiae of daily life.

Paul clearly had a difficult relationship with the Corinthian Church. We read in 1 Corinthians of the ways in which he was appalled at how their worship had descended into drunken depravity and, whilst his teaching was expected, one imagines that his visits and letters to them were difficult. He is clear that his intention had not been to cause pain but he is aware enough to recognise that pain was caused.

In our contemporary culture we see pain as something to be avoided - it's probably why we talk about the weather so much as it's safer than politics! Yet through the pain of childbirth comes new life, through the pain of growing we mature, through the pain of love we become stronger and, at the end, the pains of life ebb away as we enter into our eternal rest. Pain is part of life and one we need to embrace.

Again, as a child, there was a saying to "offer it up" meaning our pain and despondency. It's not a phrase we use much in the URC and can easily mask underlying issues but there is some truth there. We should offer to God the pain we feel and the pain we cause in the hope that through the painful experiences of life we're refined and made ever more into God's own image.

Prayer

God of sorrow and joy, you take our pain and uniting it with yours, use it to transform our world.

Give us the grace, when we cause pain, to be self-aware.

Give us the time, when we are pained, to forgive.

Give us the faith to follow you. Amen.

[Thursday 16th April - 2 Corinthians 2: 12 - 17](#)

David Reynolds is a serving elder at Cores End URC, Bucks

When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not

mind, they must realise for themselves the truth of what Paul is proclaiming to them. This is the good news of God's love, revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus died for all his people, they in faith must die to self and live for God.

And so a new world is born and a new age, where men and women, their hearts renewed, are reconciled with God and with one another.

Is Paul's exhortation timely? As we consider the church's life and mission in the world today, are we also tempted to be self-focussed, absorbed in our own concerns, carried away by showy externals? If so Paul reminds us of the need to lay ourselves before God and align ourselves with God's work of reconciliation in Christ.

Prayer:

All holy God,

Create in me a pure heart that I might know the joy of your salvation.

Give me grace to proclaim your reconciling power

In Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. Amen.

[Thursday 23rd April - 2 Corinthians 6: 1 - 12](#)

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

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

'At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.'

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,

mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Reflection

Paul's Corinthian converts do not seem to have been particularly loyal to him or his message. A groundswell of opposition has been fomented by individuals who challenge his authority and introduce a rival teaching. Theirs is a theology of glory. They emphasise showy externals, they draw attention to their own power and authority rather than God's. All is not well. This is a critical juncture in Paul's missionary career; the spiritual well-being of the Corinthian Christians is on the line.

So in a passionate outburst of lyrical fervour, Paul pours out what he believes, and exhorts these converts to hear God's message of reconciliation. This is not, they must see, an exercise in self-promotion on his part, as if he were setting out his stand in a leadership contest, but an illustration for them of what it means to be an ambassador for Christ. They are to recognise that at all times Paul stands in conscience before God. His motives are pure. He needs no other credentials. With that in

find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.

Reflection

As someone who has been blind from birth, fragrance is important. It is often said that the other senses of someone without sight are sharpened. This has been proved not to be the case. However, I probably use the senses I have in a different, possibly more productive way.

Paul begins this passage by explaining his reasons for not staying in Troas. A door has been opened for him, but Titus isn't there. Paul doesn't consider himself a one man show, and moves on to depict himself as a soldier in an army in which Christ is the general.

If a general had won a major battle, he was given a triumph in Rome. Soldiers and prisoners alike were marched through the streets, and incense was burned. For the soldiers, it signified victory, and for the prisoners, captivity, and possibly death.

When you enter a church, do you smell the fragrance of Jesus. It is intangible, and undefinable, but comes from our behaviour as people of Christ. If I had to define the smell, it would be paraffin, which was always burnt at home when I was a child. The overarching point here is that fragrance has different associations for different people, and as we struggle to comfort the homeless, provide courage and hope for those

who are sick, and give comfort to those who are bereaved, exuding that fragrance is of great importance.

Prayer

Lord God, Enable us through the power of your spirit to exude the fragrance of life, hope, love, and comfort. May our churches be churches where those who enter smell the fragrance of life and victory over death. Through this fragrance, we might bring more people to you, such that the fragrance of Jesus may fill our hearts, our churches, and the places in which we live. Amen.

[Friday 17th April - 2 Corinthians 3](#)

Fay Rowland, graduate student of Wesley House, Cambridge, worshipping at Christ the King, Northants

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the

routine. We remember these things while we are away, but we cannot see or feel them – that's what being away means. Being away is great, but it's nothing great about it if we can't then – in our time – experience home.

The Second Letter to the Corinthians today reminds us that the Church is not itself God. The Church – the Body – is an away fixture for what God offers us (and which supporter doesn't want a celebratory home fixture?). The comfort of home – the resting places, the companionship, the safety and security – is what God offers to us. God is the centre of who we are, and is the centre for all we aim to be. If we focus on what God means to us and what a home in God means for our worship, our fellowship, our community, and our world, then our passion is to make The Body into a greater reflection of God's goodness and love. We may never make it 'home' but we can certainly do more to make it a home for many.

Prayer

Loving God, who is home to us,
help us to shape our world into a home for many.
Inspire our leaders – in Church and State –
to fight for a home that is loving and kind
and that reflects all that you call us to be. Amen

[Wednesday 22nd April 2 Corinthians 5: 11 - 21](#)

The Rev'd Fleur Houston, retired minister, member of Macclesfield and Bollington URC.

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

Reflection

There's something great about going on holiday. After a busy period like Lent, Holy Week, and Easter, I know that a number of ministerial colleagues will have taken the opportunity to 'take a break' and get away from the desk for a few days, going 'away' somewhere different – maybe somewhere warm and dry.

We may really enjoy our breaks: our time away on holiday with loved ones or exploring on our own. But for many of us there reaches a point where we are ready for home. However much we enjoy our time away, there's a stage where we hanker for some of the pleasures of home: our comfortable chair looking into the garden; the companionship of neighbours and family (or a pet); or the just the home comforts of

greater glory; for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Reflection

I like to walk and chat with God (or at least, try). Part of my route takes me alongside fields, and on today's unusually clear pre-dawn morning I could see the stars. There was also a beautiful moon, and it got me thinking. (Don't imagine I'm some super-holy prayer warrior, by-the-way. I'm writing this in January, in Britain; most folks are up before dawn.) Moonlight is great, but it's only reflected glory. It's not the same as starlight. The moon, were I to visit, would seem familiar: solid surface, rocks, sunlight and shadows. A star is altogether different. Our sun is a ball of hydrogen-fuelled nuclear reactions, throwing out heat, light and all kinds of deadly radiation across millions of kilometres. It has no solid surface and its corona, an 'atmosphere' of plasma, is over a million degrees Celsius! It is so totally 'other' that I can't get my head round it. But I can cope with the moon.

I think this is what Paul was talking about when he spoke of "seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror". God is so utterly more

than we can comprehend, and all we can cope with, for present, is a reflection.

Moses saw a glimpse of God's glory, as did Elijah, and some of the disciples at Jesus' transfiguration. One day, we will all see God's full glory when we meet him face-to-face. As Paul said elsewhere, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Cor 13:12) But for the present, we are called to be moons to God's sun – to reflect his glory in the world – while God works in us to change us from one degree of glory into another.

Prayer

Father of majesty and mercy, Saviour of power and presence,
Spirit of glory and grace;
Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory, 'til in heav'n we take our place,
'til we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.
Amen.

(from Charles Wesley)

[Saturday 18th April - 2 Corinthians 4: 1 - 15](#)

Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, CRCW, Ansty Road URC & St Columba's URC,
Coventry

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is ~~the~~ God who said, 'Let light shine out

Reflection

There are times, looking in the mirror, when the grey hairs and wrinkles can make us wonder what happened to the young 'real' us. Paul clearly isn't into the struggle for eternal youth 'on the outside'. He assures us that inside we're being renewed. And there is comfort in this, despite it being completely counter-cultural. Even the males amongst us are being bombarded with ads for age-defying moisturisers, pills and potions.

But as the illnesses of later years begin to bite, it can be hard to accept them as 'slight momentary afflictions'. Those of us who have cared for a loved one struck down with dementia can bear witness to the outer nature wasting away and may query Paul's assertion about the renewal of the inner nature.

But we cannot know what goes on in someone else's head, and even someone apparently lost deep within dementia can surprise us with a moment's deep wisdom, faith, love and joy. It just takes more trust that our Lord is indeed love and knows what he's doing - so we do not lose heart.

Because losing heart is the easy thing to do. Hanging on, looking beyond the real pain of our however-long affliction to 'glory beyond measure' may sometimes - often! - seem more than we are capable of. But this too will pass. For as long as we are alive on this earth, it is all temporary and sometimes that's the only comfort there is. This too will pass.

Prayer

For those afflicted, and those afflicted by having to watch a loved one suffering, we ask for courage and strength and human beings with big hearts of love to support them as best they can. Be very real and present to your afflicted people. Shine Your light into their darkness and give them a glimpse of the glory that awaits them. Amen.

My appeal cannot be based on anything other than that the judge of all the earth will act justly. Under pressure of circumstances, I take refuge in the possibilities that God will bring to light, unpredictable mercies.

In the blindness of my fear, I often want destruction. I want an end to the humiliation of the vulnerable, but more than that I want the perpetrators to suffer. That part of the singer's prayer will not be answered. What they do to me, they do to you. So even though I am helpless, you are not, vindicate yourself.

Yet the prayer for vengeance rebounds with redeeming love, as we celebrated last week. God's truest nature absorbs hatred and violence. We cannot linger forever on Good Friday feelings, we are called to exercise hope in God's justice. New life flows, even in the bitterest of situations. Halleljuah!

Prayer

You know our hearts, You understand our powerlessness,
In the face of injustice, our desire for retribution is familiar to you.

Hear our cries for those in extreme situations,
Grant us hope to trust in your strange victory,
in the name of Jesus, Amen

[Monday 20th April 2 Corinthians 4: 16 - 18](#)

Dorothy Courtis, Lay Preacher and member, Thurso URC

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But 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. 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

The term clay jars brings a couple of images to mind, firstly, making clay dishes/ashtrays at school and how on occasion they exploded in the kiln. Secondly, the paint-your-own pottery shops in various holiday locations around the country where a lot of money is paid so a child can create a masterpiece on a mug, plate, dish or other pottery-based item.

What strikes me in both of these images is that the items are similar but have different memories attached, and the crockery is oddly sturdy and fragile at the same time. Our lives are just like that, as is our faith. There are times when our faith enables us to stay strong when people expect that we would break, but there are other times when it would be the expected norm that our faith gets us through, and in fact we feel distant from God.

Clay jars in my head vary from arts and crafts rough and ready simplicity, to beautifully handcrafted artisan pieces, and again that is like us. I look at some of my friends and colleagues and wonder at how well presented and together they are as human beings, and then think I must look like a child's art and craft project in comparison with my less than togetherness, then I am reminded that to others, I am the one they see as all worked out together grown up and they see themselves as the "mess".

The thing is, to God, we are all the child's messy art and craft clay project that didn't make it out of the kiln intact, but that is exactly why we are called by God to show and share the message of hope to God's glory, because through God, we are all made artisan handcrafted pieces even on the days we feel arts and craft.

Prayer

Creator God, you have crafted the universe precisely,
And even when we feel like the rough arts and crafts clay pot
Remind us that we still hold your grace and spirit and are called by you.
Amen

[Sunday 19th April Psalm 143](#)

The Rev'd Richard Church member of Streatham URC, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

1 O hear my prayer, LORD; My cry for mercy heed.

In truth and righteousness Draw near to meet my need.

2 And do not judge me in your sight For in your presence none is right.
My heart within me is dismayed.

3 The foe has hounded me
And crushed me to the ground,
In darkness made me dwell,
Like those in death long bound.

4 And so my spirit is afraid;

5 Therefore I call to mind
The days and years long gone;
I ponder all your works
And what your hands have done.

16 To you in prayer

I spread my hands;
For you I thirst, like arid lands.

7 My spirit fails, O LORD;
Come quickly to my side.
Hide not your face from me,
Lest to the pit I slide.

8 Let morning bring your love anew,
For I have put my trust in you.

To you I lift my soul;
Show me the way to go.

9 I hide myself in you;
LORD, save me from my foe.
10 My God, teach me to do your
will;
May your good Spirit lead me still.

11 For your great mercy's sake,
O LORD, preserve my life;
And in your righteousness
Deliver me from strife.

12 In love, put all my foes to shame;
Destroy them, for I bear your name.

Reflection

Even in this Easter season it is possible to feel devitalised, drained, and overwhelmed by the seeming victory of wrongdoing in the world. In other words, one week later, it is possible to live more in Good Friday than in the hope and joy of Easter Day.

The singer here reflects on a cut throat society in which (s)he feels persecuted. So strong is the sense of psychological shock and humiliation that (s)he compares it to being close to death. Through the agency of Amnesty International today, one hears of situations in which even the judiciary cannot be relied on to administer justice. To whom then can a prisoner of conscience turn?

The response of the Psalmist is, with trepidation, to address his/her situation to the God who is defined by covenant grace. I remember God's saving acts. I ponder the signs of God's grace in the past and present. It emboldens me to cry out to God on behalf of myself, my family, my society, my suffering earth for relief.