

The First Sunday after Trinity

Collect: O God, the strength of all those who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 130:

Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice;
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
My soul waits for the Lord, more than the night watch for the morning,
more than the night watch for the morning.
O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy;
With him is plenteous redemption and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

2 Corinthians 4.13—5.1 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 Him 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. 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,¹⁸ 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. 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.

Gospel: Mark 3.20—end. After appointing his disciples, Jesus went home, but the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' ²³ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan?' ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered. ²⁸ 'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'— ³⁰ for the people had said of Jesus: 'He has an unclean spirit.' ³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' ³³ And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!' ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

Reflection:

With the period from Lent to Pentecost now over, we are picking up again the readings from Mark's Gospel and this being the shortest Gospel, much has already been included about Jesus, since his baptism and his time of reflection in the desert. By chapter three verse 20, we find that he has been teaching in the Synagogue, healing a man with a mental illness on the Sabbath, a day for this that many of the teachers of the law deemed as being inappropriate.

Mark also writes of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, healing a person with leprosy, and writes about a paralysed man whose friends have lowered through the roof of a house and who Jesus has encouraged to get up and walk. Common to these things is that the people being healed had been for different reasons excluded from the faith community and those who had connected the cause of their illness as because they had done something wrong and were being punished. Jesus will have none of this. Instead, he welcomes them and tells them that they can get on and now live a full life.

And there has been much more. Rather than fasting on the Sabbath, Jesus has been eating and drinking with the tax collectors. Letting them know that despite popular opinion God really does love them and wants them to flourish, despite the nature of their work giving them a bad reputation. And more recently Jesus and his disciples have really upset the teachers of the law by plucking heads of grain in the fields on the Sabbath, which Jesus reminds the leaders that their great King David had also done. But more importantly, he challenges these religious leaders about the way that they make faith a chore, religious practice a burden of too many pointless and fussy rules. And just before our passage he has healed a man with a withered hand, this kind and life enhancing transformation also taking place on the Sabbath. Those who witness it are already beginning to believe that Jesus' ability, gift, in curing the sick of all sorts of disorders comes from God. God whose ways are being made clearer each day in everything that Jesus says and does. So how does his family react? Well, they think that he has gone mad. His upbringing had been fairly traditional and there had been only the one sign, when he went missing at the Temple, that he might later on in his life try to change the world by challenging the restrictive religious orthodoxy that controlled peoples' lives, leaving people like the strong man in the story who is tied up, so that are tied up emotionally and spiritually. The religious leaders interpreting the law so as to make people feel negative and bad about themselves. Raising a bar about human behaviour that could never be met with them focusing on religious practices that rather than help people face the daily challenges of life, instead burdened them with unnecessary laws, and with practices of sacrifice that in the ritual hid and made a secret of God's love and forgiveness.

Forgiveness and reconciliation that Jesus showed through the laying down of his life but which he also recognised could be found in human generosity of spirit, the willingness to go the extra mile and give a person another chance, the willingness to look for what is good and not to focus on the negative. To do this by walking alongside people every day and making religious practices joyful and religious faith a way of making sense of life's experiences, continuing to give hope always that God will come through and help us find a way through.

Paul called this being raised with Christ, meaning that living the way of Jesus and together as a community of faith is always about looking out for others, especially those most broken by life, and being available both to listen and to learn from them and to truly to accept and love.

Paul was probably a tent maker by trade and camping, caravanning is something that in the current climate of uncertainty with the necessary restrictions, increasing numbers of people are enjoying. We know that while these holiday experiences are temporary, they can help us connect more fully with what life is like and has always been like for most people. Connecting with the chores that need to be done, facing the elements of the weather in a variety of circumstances and to feel closer to the living world and God's good earth.

And Paul also reminds us that when we make these connections, we also come closer to having a sense of the bigger picture of things, of the connectedness of human life in the world that we share, our human life with all that lives, and to consider the wisdom of God as both beyond our understanding but made also made real to us in Jesus and so for us to make real for others, as we follow and live his way.