

Reading and homily for Tenth Sunday after Trinity 2020



Andrew Carr, Reader, St Edmund & St Alban Dartford

Reading:

Romans 8:26-39

click on the following link for the reading:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8%3A26-39&version=NIVUK>

Homily

Today is the Tenth Sunday after Trinity. This is another challenging, inspirational passage of which one theologian wrote: ‘...God’s purpose for those who are in Christ is precisely Christ-shaped. They are chosen and called in order to advance God’s purpose in and for the world... That which is true of the Messiah is true of his people.’ (see Matthew 28:18-20 – link below)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+28%3A18-20&version=NIVUK>

The whole chapter presents a display of the power of God’s grace and of His provision for His people.

I selected the above image for this homily based upon ‘more than conquerors...’ (v37). I liked the fact that those photographed had scaled a high place, conquered the climb, to encounter the cross...

When we are struggling to pray (more often than we might care to admit..?) and have no idea what to pray for or how, the Holy Spirit is most obviously at work. He draws out of us not clear nor clever words, but instead a groaning (a moaning if you read certain Psalms... +) which cannot at the moment come, or be translated, into words. This is prayer beyond prayer, diving down deep beyond our current understanding. There is a challenge here to all who believe –

individually and collectively – to be willing to pray like this (when set and personal prayers are done) to pray and to prayer in which we are so caught up in the loving, redeeming touch of the Spirit enabling us so that we may more deeply seek and find the Father.

It's worth noting that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfil His purpose. His ultimate goal is to make us more like Christ. That said, my own experience of being called to be a Reader has led me to a contentment that I had not known previously, but it has not been easy, more usually its been hard. Yet I know I have responded to God's calling and He has blessed me.

'If God is for us, who can be against us? (verse 31) is an encouragement to faith, a challenge to faith and a calling to strengthening of faith. The next verse provides an example that would have been particularly familiar to Jewish converts, or perhaps more of an echo, with the story of Abraham and Isaac and God's love and provision, albeit with an extreme element. That said, the echo should be made within the clear context that Isaac was spared, Jesus was not.

It's also worth noting (borrowed from a commentary) that: 'these words were for a church that would soon undergo terrible persecution from the Roman Empire. Paul's cited examples became painful realities. Yet no matter what happens to us, no matter where we are, we can never be lost to His love. Suffering should not drive us away from God, but help us to identify with Him further and allow His love to reach and heal us.'

'More than conquerors' (verse 37) needs some explanation. Paul sees it in the death and resurrection of Jesus as proof of Jesus' love for us, you, me... He anticipated that his listeners might experience some, if not all, of the calamities mentioned in verse 35-36 and yet because they are in Christ Jesus to triumph over and through them. We are not 'more than conquerors' in and of ourselves, it's not our own strength or some collective sense of purpose, rather it's Jesus' love and empowering by the Spirit (the armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28-31) and the fruits (Galatians 5:22-23) of the Spirit given to us) that makes us, you, me, conquerors. Apparently, in the original Greek, in which the letter was written, the word used for 'conquerors' was *hypernikōmen* which meant 'super conquerors' – so no pressure then!

Moving on.

It's possible too that Paul, in verse 37, is preparing his listeners for actual martyrdom, even predicting his own... The 'terrible persecution from the Roman Empire' saw Christians hunted, crucified, and even used as 'torches' to light roads to and from Rome at night...

It's possible that "powers and rulers" referred to then contemporary earthly authorities (specifically Jewish in Israel and Roman everywhere else in the context of the time this letter was dictated) before whom Christians might be brought. "Height" and "depth" were used traditionally about things above the sky # and beneath the earth (for example, in Jewish theology, a place called *Sheol* – a place of darkness to which the dead go. Under some circumstances the dead were thought to be able to be contacted by the living – there is an echo of this in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31 – link below):

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A19-31&version=NIVUK>

Finally, the scope of God's love for us, you, me is greater than the scope of any and all earthly powers, whether natural or supernatural or '...anything else in all creation.'

If we grasp this truth in v31 – 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' – and take it completely to mind and to heart then we will not be afraid.

Until we meet again, keep safe, keep well, keep praying.

AMEN

+ For example Psalms 3, 7, 10, 13, 29, 41, 90...

The cosmology ("science of the origin and development of the universe") of the time, a heady cocktail of astronomy and astrology (the Magi who visited Jesus were most likely those who studied cosmology), was a fundamental part of the First Century AD worldview. Whether it was the philosopher contemplating the perfection of the heavenly orbits, the farmer searching the sky for signs of when to plant his crops, or desert-dwelling dissidents looking for the end of the world, the cosmos held an endless fascination and occupied a prominent place in their understanding of life. *Adapted from Pennington & McDonough (2008)*