

March 23, 2020

Greetings in Jesus's Name.

It was nice to hear you all yesterday. I hope it was as meaningful to you as it was to me. This week I will share the lectionary readings. Today's reading is from Romans 8:1-11. I have printed the first 4 verses, but the only one I find important is verse 1.

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

This is one little sentence that the Apostle Paul pens in a letter to some people in Rome. People who were, apparently, a lot like us. That is, they were trying to make sense of their lives. Trying to understand why and how things in their lives and culture were moving so quickly, changing so fast. Trying to understand. And trying — *really trying* — to figure out what their faith had to do with all of this.

During all this, they get this letter from Paul that sums up his take on the Christian faith — how we are all confused about God's will, often unable to fulfill it, and so fall short. About how God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves by sending us Jesus that we might be made right — justified — not by what we do or don't do but by faith in Jesus; that is, by trusting that in Jesus we see God's love poured out for us and all the world. It's not that we don't still sin — though we try not to — and it's not like we don't still feel guilty about sin — though we hate that feeling. In fact, as Paul writes, the Christian life often feels like being stuck between knowing what to do and yet not being able to do it. It's not a good feeling, but, hey, no one said it would be easy.

And then comes Paul's sentence, maybe the only thing you really need to hear from the whole letter: **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!"** Read it again! No condemnation. None. Nada. When? In some distant future. No, now. Right now. This very moment. Why, because God loves us enough to forgive us, to restore us, to welcome us into God's loving embrace like a loving parent welcomes back an errant child.

According to Paul, in fact, that's why Jesus came — not to suffer in our stead. Not to show us how to live so that we merit God's love. Not to satisfy

some weird sense of justice that makes it possible for God to love us only if blood is shed. And not to have the crap kicked out of him for sin so that we can feel eternally and simultaneously guilty and grateful. No. Jesus came to show us through his cross just how much God *already* loves us. And to show us through his resurrection that his love is more powerful than *anything* — than death, our sin, our confusion, and even our sense of being condemned.

To hear Paul's amazing pronouncement and promise that "**there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!**" To hear, that is, that no matter what we've done or has been done to us, no matter what we may have previously heard or presently believe, God is not angry with us. To hear that God loves us, forgives us, accepts us as we are, and sets us free to live our lives.

Now why do I write this? Because I am beginning to hear from folks that our present pandemic is a judgment of God. IT IS NOT!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning; Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will hope in God. In this time of pandemic may we know that God's presence and faithfulness will endure forever. Let us put our trust in God, knowing we are forgiven, loved, and restored because of God's great love. Amen.

God Bless

Roger