

Last week we heard that familiar prayer which Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church that we call “the Grace”. Today our readings show us God’s grace at work and I have chosen 3 examples of what some have done with this amazing gift of grace.

In our Old Testament Reading this morning we find the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses, after wise counsel from his Father in Law Jethro, had appointed God fearing and trustworthy group leaders because Moses was being so overworked hearing all their disagreements. God calls Moses to the Mountain and tells him what to say to them. He graciously reminds them that he brought them safely out of Egypt because he wanted them to be his treasured possession, God wanted them to be his priestly kingdom and a holy nation and obey his voice and keep his covenant. All the leaders answered that they would do everything that the Lord had spoken.

Of course we know that despite their best endeavours they were not able to keep their side of the covenant even after having the Ten Commandments as a guide to holy living. What they really needed was a Messiah. They had to wait 1400 years before Jesus of Nazareth came to their cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues and curing their illnesses. Graciously his heart goes out to them because they are so harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He even distils the complexity of the laws that had been developed over the centuries into just 2 – Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

But there is still much to do, so he enlists the help of his 12 disciples. Jesus gives them his authority and sends them out to physically and spiritually heal people, for nothing just as he had done. They are to focus on the lost sheep of Israel because the job of sharing the good news of the Kingdom to the people of Samaria and the Gentile world would be something they would have to do after Jesus had finished his earthly mission and the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out into their lives and then overflowed into the lives of people in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

At the online home group on Monday we were discussing Jesus' authority and certainly there are plenty of examples in the Gospels of Jesus using his Authority to perform Miracles. On Trinity Sunday the gospel records Jesus' last words to his disciples. "All Authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations". This authority comes from our Loving God and is full of grace. Jesus chose to lay down his life and his authority to prove his love for us and give us a new relationship with the God of Grace.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, who were living under a very different kind of authority, to remind them that their standing before God was not based on what they have done but in their faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross. It is by faith that we have peace with God and it is Jesus that has obtained access to this amazing grace so we can share our new found hope with others.

Grace allows God's love to be poured out into our hearts despite our weaknesses. It lets the process of transformation work in us day after day through all our tribulations, and we have all had a lot to deal with during the lock down. Thankfully we have grace to endure and through our experiences we are able to prove our Faith in a God who does not disappoint us. This is a process for growing in Faith, learning to know, love and follow Jesus day by day.

This reminded me of the prayer of St Richard whose feast day is next Tuesday. Richard's life is a good example of how grace works in some one. Born in 1197 in Whyce near modern day Droitwich, he was orphaned along with his brother and sister at quite an early age. He worked hard to help them pay off the equivalent of medieval death duties, then gave up his inheritance to pursue his education at Oxford, elected Chancellor of the University in 1235, then Chancellor of the Diocese of Canterbury and finally elected Bishop of Chichester in 1244. A disagreement over his appointment with King Henry III meant that everyone was forbidden even to house or feed him. So he resorted to walking the entire Diocese on foot, he wore a simple hair shirt and woollen cloak and lived a very frugal

existence being vegetarian since his days in Oxford. He is probably best remembered for his prayer popularised in the Song Day by Day from the musical Godspel which we performed in Holy Trinity over 20 years ago in 1997.

His prayer to know, love and follow Jesus more each day is a legacy that is still very much at the heart of this diocese’s mission.

The recent protests over the death of George Floyd and the backlash for those who had been involved with the slave trade reminded me of another example in the life of John Newton. Born in 1725 and taken to sea at the age of 11 by his Father, he was press ganged into Naval service at 18. At one point he tried to desert and was punished with a flogging of eight dozen lashes. At 20 he found himself in West Africa and got involved in the slave trade but 3 years later he was rescued by a sea captain who had been sent by his father to search for him. It was on this return voyage that he had his spiritual conversion. The ship got caught in a severe storm and was in danger of sinking so he prayed for God’s Mercy and the storm began to die down. It wasn’t until 1788 34 years after he retired from the slave trade that he published his thoughts upon the slave trade which he sent to every MP. He became an ally of William Wilberforce and the rest as they say is history. As a priest at Olney Church he wrote the hymn that would become Amazing Grace and he and William Cowper wrote a great many more.

And this brings us back to today which has been designated by the Royal School of Music as Music Sunday. It’s a chance to celebrate the role of music and the musicians in our church life. Let’s thank God for all those who live out their faith though their musical gifts, giving of their time and talents to help us worship God and share the good news through words and music. Although lock down has severely impacted this, Richard has been able to record playing the voluntaries and the responses for Choral Evensong and provide the choir with music for the

online services. Hopefully it won't be too long before we are able listen to our Bell Ringers calling us to worship, and listening to Richard and the choristers live.

We all have the opportunity to let the truth of God's amazing grace change us, what we need to do is find ways of allowing this grace to flow through us and into the lives who have still need to experience it. Amen. Words [1241].