**Romans sermon series session 2**

**11th February** **2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Peter’s, Stonesby

**Reading: Romans 1. 18 - 23; 2. 1 - 3; 3. 20 - 23**

1. **Sin**

**18**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, **19**since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. **20**For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. **21**For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22**Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools **23**and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. … You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. **2**Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. **3**So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? … **19**Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. **20**Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin… **23**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..

**Introduction**

Last Sunday, we began a sermon series on Romans. We’re using the structure from Dr Andrew Ollerton’s book *Romans: A Letter that Makes Sense of Life,* and material from the companion course he has produced with the Bible Society. If you were in Scalford last week, then you may recall how our journey through Romans is described as being like climbing a mountain – and you’ll see on the pink coloured leaflet a picture of a mountain showing where each chapter of Romans fits in. To quote Andrew Ollerton: “It’s been said that if the New Testament were the Himalayas, Romans would be Mount Everest and chapter 8 would be the summit.” We started from basecamp last week when we looked at Paul as the author of the letter, those to whom he was writing in Rome, and the core message Paul wanted to convey – the message about the “gospel of God.” Paul wrote that he was “not ashamed of the gospel ... for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.” The word ‘gospel’ means good news, but sometimes before we are ready to receive good news, we need to face up to what seems bad news. A bit like a patient visiting a doctor, we need to hear the diagnosis before we can receive treatment. So our ascent of Romans begins in a rather unexpected way – we go down into the valley of sin and explore what’s wrong with our world, before we start to go up. Sin isn’t something most of us talk about much. I wonder if you’ve heard the story of the parishioner who spoke encouragingly to the local vicar after a Sunday service: ‘Vicar, we didn’t know what sin was until you came to this parish.’ Today we’ll think about sin in the light of God’s love and reflect on 3 things: the truth about God; the truth about sin; and the truth about us.

**The truth about God (Romans 1. 18 – 20)**

In today’s passage, Paul points out that God has revealed His nature through creation, so that everyone can discern something of what God is like. As an artist displays their personality on canvas, so God displays His “eternal power and divine nature” in creation. And the God we glimpse through creation is the One who delights in beauty and diversity, the scale and detail of whose handiwork is utterly awesome. You may recall that recently NASA unveiled images of distant galaxies taken by the Webb Telescope, successor to the Hubble Telescope. The depth and beauty of the images caught many off guard – grown scientists broke down in tears when they took in the magnitude of what they were witnessing. When we contemplate creation, we glimpse God’s greatness. And this is something that every human being - whether religious or not - can sense.

God called creation into being out of love, and – as the opening of Genesis reminds us – “saw that it was good.” That needs to be our starting point when we think about what has gone wrong – about the brokenness of our world alongside its beauty. We need to remember the good news, so that we can see the bad news in proper perspective. And today’s passage begins by reminding us that God is not happy with the way things are: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people.”

The word wrath describes God’s anger and judgment against what is evil. God is angry and sad about the way sin causes so much damage and destruction – personal, social, and environmental. And so God’s wrath is an extension of His love and care for creation, including you and me.

**The truth about sin (Romans 1. 18, 21 – 23)**

The word “sin” can sound rather old fashioned. However those of you who are rugby fans know what a ‘sin bin’ means – a player who breaks the rules is sent to the ‘sin bin’ for 10 minutes. And in rugby there are also conversions! But Paul wants us to understand how sin is something much more pervasive than doing something naughty. Paul defines sin as idolatry – which basically means replacing God with false substitutes known as idols. Sin is not just about doing bad things, but about putting good things in the place of God.

As those created in the image of God, we are all hard-wired to worship. If we reject the living God, we will find alternative shrines. For as the French reformer John Calvin put it the human heart is a ‘perpetual idol factory.’

What does God do about this? Well according to Paul, God opens the door to sinners, gives them what they want, and lets them go – like the father of the prodigal son in the parable Jesus told. God hates to see us destroy ourselves, but God also does not override our decisions. Instead God gives us over to the consequences of our choices, in the hope that we will finally come to our senses, and turn back to the One who alone is truly worthy of our worship.

**The truth about us (Romans 2. 1 – 3; 3. 23)**

In Romans 1 Paul addresses the idolatry of Gentiles. You can

imagine Jewish hearers thinking, ‘I’m glad that’s not true of

me.’ But then in Romans 2, Paul turns on his Jewish readers and tells them they are just as guilty! Why is it that we often find it easier to identify sin in other people’s lives than in our own? It’s so easy to judge others and ignore the fact that we have been guilty of the same thing. I wonder if you’ve heard this quote from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, reminding us of an uncomfortable truth: “The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.’

There’s something refreshingly honest about how Paul concludes today’s passage from Romans: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All, with no exceptions. And that’s what you and I acknowledge each time we say the prayer of confession as we shall later in the service – ‘we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins’. In the light of God’s commandments – summed up in the two great commandments to love God and our neighbour as ourselves - we acknowledge that none of us is able to measure up, and all of us are in need of God’s mercy. Confession opens the door to God, and builds friendship with others. The gospel tells us that all have sinned, but also that all are welcome.

**Conclusion: How do we live in the light of this?**

Lent – course and groups …

Three other suggestions …

Perhaps we could learn more about the Creator by observing creation? Gazing up at the stars or looking at the countryside around us, we could reflect on the words of Psalm 8.

Or again, what about idols? Is there anything in our life in danger of taking the place rightfully deserved by God? You might find it helpful to consider questions such as: What do I spend the most time thinking about? What do I invest in most, with my time, energy or money? What distracts me from devotion to God? What do I most fear losing?

Finally we might consider whether we have a tendency to judge other people, rather than identify our own sin. And that can also apply collectively – to us as a church, or village community. Are there particular types of people towards whom we find it hard to be welcoming? Who would feel particularly judged if they were to walk into our church? And what can we do to change that?

**Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus, thank You that You are merciful and forgiving to Your people, even though we have rebelled against You. We have turned away from You to try and rule over our own lives. Many times, we have made ourselves judge and ruler over others. Forgive us for condemning others silently or audibly, while ignoring our own prejudices, unhealthy attitudes and sinful behaviours. Lord, we have no hope, except for Your love and forgiveness to heal and restore

us. Forgive us Lord, and guide our words, thoughts and deeds today so that we may live in ways that honour You. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.