**Romans sermon series**

**21st April 2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Denys’, Eaton & Village Morning Worship at St. Mary Magdalene, Waltham on the Wolds.

**Reading: Romans 15. 17 - 20; 30 – 33; Romans 16. 25 - 27**

1. **Mission**

**17**Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. **18**I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – **19**by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. **20**It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.

**30**I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. **31**Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favourably received by the Lord’s people there, **32**so that I may come to you with joy, by God’s will, and in your company be refreshed. **33**The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

**25**Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, **26**but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith – **27**to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

**Romans sermon series 10 Mission**

**Reflection by the Rector, Revd Canon John Barr**

Over the past few weeks, we have been exploring St Paul’s letter to the Romans, drawing on Dr Andrew Ollerton’s book *Romans: A Letter That Makes Sense of Life.* Using the picture of a mountain, we began at the base camp of the Gospel, went down into the valley of Sin before starting our ascent through the crux of Salvation, the place of Peace, the ridge of Freedom, before reaching the summit of Hope. Since then we have begun to make out way down through the cloud of Mystery, descent of Devotion, and return to Community before reaching today - the last stage of the route - the onward Mission.

And mission is clearly something Paul was passionate about. In chapter 15 of Romans, we catch a glimpse of his ambitious mission plans. After travelling from Corinth to Jerusalem to deliver a gift collected for Jewish believers, Paul planned to sail to Rome to meet the recipients of his letter for the first time. Then he would head on to southern Spain to open up a new frontier of mission. But life doesn’t always go according to plan – even if you are the Apostle Paul. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read how Paul was falsely accused and arrested in Jerusalem, kept behind bars for two years, before claiming his right as a Roman citizen to be tried by Caesar. Paul did eventually get to Rome around AD58, but as a political prisoner under house arrest. I wonder how Paul would have felt about this? He must have felt confused, and wondered why God allowed this to happen. Maybe in some dark moments of deep despair, he might have wondered what good could possibly come from this. Yet the final verses of Acts record for us how Paul conducted himself while in Rome. Despite the sense of fear, failure and setback, Paul “proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance.” Paul’s confidence in the gospel and his commitment to share it remained constant, whatever the circumstances. Despite his plans being torn up, Paul remained committed to playing his part in the onward mission. And that can also encourage us when our plans are thwarted. Meditating on Romans can help us to be more resilient in the face of life’s setbacks and disappointments.

Paul was motivated for mission. He longed for that time when the rich diversity of God’s people – Jews and Gentiles together – would “with one mind and one voice… glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And – near the start of today’s passage from Romans 15 - Paul states how his mission method was to share the gospel “by what I have said and done”, and “through the power of the Spirit of God.” Paul knew that words alone are not enough. People need to see and experience the gospel in action – for example, through acts of kindness, generosity and compassion.

Paul’s example can also encourage us. Like him, we need to be clear about our mission – what is it here in Waltham, and across our Ironstone villages? How motivated are we for that mission? And in what ways can we communicate the gospel in word and deed? In his book on Romans, Andrew Ollerton shares how he finds it helpful to start the day with a simple prayer: ‘Lord, show me who I can bless today in Jesus’ name’. What about us - who can you and I bless today?

As we draw to the end of our series on Romans, perhaps it is a good time to look back on the journey through this ‘Mount Everest’ of the New Testament. Two of Paul’s great passions pulsate through Romans – mission and unity. Paul wants to mobilise God’s people for mission, and he wants to cultivate greater unity between the different house churches in Rome. However these themes are not addressed directly until towards the end of Romans – from chapters 12 to 16. Paul spends the first 11 chapters exploring the height and breadth of God’s great purpose revealed through the gospel. Having opened Romans with a declaration of confidence - “I am not ashamed of the gospel” – Paul now closes his letter with the prayer we heard at the end of today’s passage: **“**Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith – to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

For Paul the goal of Romans has been to “establish” Christians in the gospel. Andrew Ollerton suggests that in his closing words Paul hints at how the gospel he proclaimed is a **rooted story**, a **relevant story**, and a **relational story**. The gospel is a story deeply rooted in history “now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God.” The story of salvation stretches back to creation and the covenant God made with Abraham, and stretches forward to the new covenant made with the blood of Christ which one day will climax in the glorious new creation.

As well as being a rooted story, the gospel is a relevant story for everyone, and for the whole of creation. It is not just “an insurance policy when we die”, as Andrew Ollerton puts it. No, the gospel is good news on a cosmic scale. The message of Jesus is not a private belief, but public truth - it announces the Lordship of Christ over the whole of life, and summons the nations “to the obedience that comes from faith.”

The gospel is a rooted story, and a relevant story. As we have explored Paul’s letter to the Romans, we can also see how it is a deeply relational story. Romans was written to small communities of God’s people who - despite all their diversity - were united in Christ as one family of faith, and bound together by the Spirit. God was able to do wonderful things through them, as they committed themselves to growing in faith and sharing in the mission of the gospel. Just as God is able to do with us in our small and diverse churches, if we too are committed to growing in faith, and to sharing the gospel in word and deed. It won’t always be easy – there will certainly be plenty of challenges and setbacks, just as Paul found for himself. But in the light of Easter, we have been given a hope to sustain us in all circumstances and the assurance that nothing – not even death – can separate us from “the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So – to use Paul’s closing prayer in Romans Chapter 15 – “May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.