**Romans sermon series session 5**

**3rd March 2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Egelwin’s, Scalford

**Reading: Romans 7.1-6**

1. **Freedom**

The ridge of Freedom.

During Lent, we have been following Andrew Ollerton’s book, ‘Romans; A letter that makes sense of life’. In it he likens our journey of Faith to a walk or hike up and down a steep mountain.

We began at Basecamp where we learnt about the Gospel. The next chapter was about Sin as we dropped into a valley which we had to climb out of, encouraged by the prospect and view of our climb. Then came The Crux of Salvation where we steadily learned that we are all saved by the Grace of God and this led us to our first break or rest, our lunch break if you like and The Place of Peace.

Today we have reached the narrow path that leads ahead of us to the summit and this section covers both chapters 6 and 7 of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Andrew Ollerton likens these 2 chapters to the Ridge of Freedom and we heard just a short section from Chapter 7 as our Epistle. It is this ridge I want to focus on today.

When climbing a mountain, one often finds that the way forward is along a narrow ridge which has a steep drop of scree on both sides. Its maybe a time to get those walking poles out to stop us slipping down one side or the other.

To one side Paul likens it to the temptation to live by the letter of the Law. The Law given to Moses as a guidance to the wandering Israelites on how to live a life worthy of being a follower of the Creator God. However, over time, the Lawyers, Scribes and Pharisees fell into the trap of using the Law to their own advantage on the premise that ‘If we obey the Law, we shall be right with God’. They also embroidered the Law to include all sorts of interpretations of their own devising. A good example of this was related in our Gospel today when Jesus challenges those in the Temple court for selling cattle and exchanging money for payments in the Temple. This is indeed a slippery slope, easy to fall into with its idea of being justified by obeying the Law. Paul warns us that we are all saved by the Grace of God alone and it is our Faith in God that enables His Grace to abide in us. We cannot earn it by good works or by being law abiding.

Andrew likens the Law with a spirit level. I can use this to tell me if this pillar is vertical or leaning to one side. I can use it to tell if the floor is horizontal or on a slope. But I cannot use it to correct any leaning pillar or sloping floor. The Law tells us what is right and what is wrong, but it does not tell us how to go about changing it, we do not get help with living it.

If we have already been redeemed from sin, are we able to sin all the more in order to receive even more Grace? Not at all, says Paul. And so now we look at the other side of the ridge. This time the slippery scree is made up of our mortal bodies for which sin comes naturally. Its not something that we can ignore or forget about. We are all sinners and that’s that. But we can do something about it and prevent ourselves sliding down that side of the ridge. Paul likens this to a marriage. The wife is bound by law to obey her husband for as long as he lives. When he dies, she is freed from this promise and can marry again without committing adultery. We too can be freed from the sins of our mortal bodies.

We can keep from falling down this side of the ridge because Jesus died on a cross to save us, to save you and me, from our sins. When we were baptised, we joined Christ in not just his Baptism but also His death and Resurrection. We were offered a spiritual life, apart from our mortal life, in which we can say no to our mortal sinning. Faith in God enables us to say no to our fleshly desires and temptations. Faith in God enables us to say no to the sins of greed, pride and so on. Before Jesus was crucified, he told his disciples that he would die and rise again on the third day. And that He would send the Holy Spirit to give those with Faith in God the power and strength to resist the devil and live according to God’s Law. In Baptism, we received this gift of the Holy Spirit and were offered a new life.

Jesus was pointing the way of life forwards and Paul tells the Romans, be they rich or poor, be they slaves of free, be they Jew or Gentile that by avoiding the slippery slopes of, on one hand the religious abiding of the Law and on the other hand, the inevitable sins of our mortal bodies, we can enter a life of Freedom. We are now slaves to Freedom through our Faith in God. This Freedom brings a wealth of happiness and joy to us for our lives become enriched with the love of God, who cares for each and every one of us.

That is not to say that we shall not be tempted to sin again. We shall, but now we have the power to set sin aside. We still abide in our mortal bodies but we can now not just affirm our faith but live it every moment of our lives. And in so doing we shall be secure in the knowledge that we have received our Freedom.