**Romans sermon series**

**17th March 2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Denys’, Eaton

**Reading: Romans 10. 9 – 15**

1. **Mystery**

**9**if you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10**For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. **11**As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ **12**For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, **13**for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ **14**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? **15**And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

**Introduction**

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* and the course produced by the Bible Society. 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. If Romans is the Mount Everest of the New Testament, then last Sunday, Sue led us up to the summit! As we reflected on Romans chapter 8, we were given a panoramic view of God’s purpose for us, and for the whole of creation. In this wonderful chapter, Paul sheds the light of hope into the shadows of our present struggles and suffering. And he assures us that, through Jesus Christ, God is working His purpose out, and that nothing can separate us from His love.

Today, as we begin our descent from the summit, we find ourselves engulfed in the cloud of mystery. Maybe, like me, you’ve found yourself either out walking or driving on a familiar route, when suddenly the mist or fog suddenly closes in on you, and you can’t see the way ahead. It’s a bit like that with Paul’s argument in Romans chapters 9 – 11, where he wrestles with the mystery of God’s sovereign purposes. In his book *God of Surprises*, the Jesuit priest Gerard Hughes reminds us that mystery is ‘par for the course’ on the journey of faith: “God is mystery, a beckoning word, and he calls us out beyond our narrowness. … The journey to God is a journey of discovery and it is full of surprises.”

Reading Romans chapters 9 – 11 can certainly leave us with more questions than answers. For example, why does God choose to act in certain ways, and through certain people? Or what about the unique election of Israel? And does that really mean that others are rejected, shut outside of God’s loving purposes? Again, what about God’s sovereignty and our own human free will?

Perhaps at this point we need to remind ourselves that Paul was writing to a diverse and scattered group of Christians who secretly gathered in house churches across the city of Rome. A few years before Phoebe delivered Paul’s letter to Rome, the Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from living in the city. This meant that for several years Gentile believers would have got used to being the only Christians around, and perhaps had started to assume that they could sever the Jewish roots of their faith. However after the death of Claudius in AD54, some Jewish Christians began to return to Rome, and the existing Gentile Christian community found their reintegration to be hugely challenging. It raised big questions about the Jewish people, and the place of Israel in God’s saving purposes. As we read Romans chapters 9 – 11, we need to remember that this was the situation of division and mistrust Paul was addressing, as he focussed on God’s election of Israel in the past (Romans 9), and God’s promise to redeem Israel in the future (Romans 11). We also need to remember that Paul’s focus was less on God’s calling (or election) to salvation, and more on God’s calling to serve as His mouthpiece to the world. And that in this, God is always sovereign – as Andrew Ollerton puts it in his book on Romans “we do not line manage God and he does not owe us an explanation.” We need to have a tolerance for mystery, and to trust God’s purposes when we cannot see the way ahead.

In the short passage we heard this morning from Romans chapter 10, Paul reminds us of a paradox at the heart of the Christian faith. That, although God is sovereign, you and I have a part to play in the outworking of God’s purposes. In particular, we are to do so by confessing that Jesus is Lord, and by communicating the Gospel to all.

1. **Confess that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10. 9 - 13)**

First, we are to confess that Jesus is Lord. On our journey through Romans so far, Paul has made it clear that we don’t earn our salvation by our deeds or by our DNA. Rather, we receive it by faith. Roman society was obsessed with hierarchy and, through their wealth, people could buy their way into the most privileged positions. Not so in the

Kingdom of God. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Salvation is not just for the rich or powerful, but for everyone. And “there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all.”

Those who confess that “Jesus is Lord” and who believe that “God raised him from the dead” are saved. Perhaps if we have been a Christian for many years, it is easy to forget the radical nature of what it really means to call Jesus Lord. Those to whom Paul wrote in Rome well knew that Caesar himself was known as Lord, or *Kyrios* in Greek. To declare that Jesus is Lord was to say that Caesar isn’t - a radical and costly claim. So who or what are the ‘lords’ in our society, who or what demands our allegiance and worship? And what might you and I need to renounce, in order to make Jesus the only Lord of our lives?

**2. Communicate the Gospel to all (Romans 10. 14 - 15)**

Second, we are to communicate the Gospel to all. If people can’t experience salvation through their deeds or DNA, but only through calling on Jesus’ name, then what about

those who have never heard the Gospel? Paul doesn’t address this directly – it is one of the secret things that belongs to God – but he does say that we have a role to play in taking the Gospel to others. Perhaps, like me, you have some people to thank for sharing the Gospel with you? I especially think of those who shared the Gospel with me when I was a student, and also when I started working as a civil servant in London.

It is good to remember and to be thankful for those who first shared the good news with us. Earlier in Romans Chapter 9, Paul expresses his love for his fellow Jews. His passion for sharing the Gospel with them is not motivated by a sense of duty, but out of love. What about us? Who do you and I know among our family and friends, neighbours and colleagues that have not heard the Gospel? And if you can’t think of any particular people, why not ask God to give you a deep compassion for others, and help you to see them as he does.

One way we can all play our part is by praying regularly for a few people we know who don’t yet know Jesus. And thinking of where our ‘feet’ will take us this week – we could also pray for opportunities to share the good news to others. At the end of today’s passage, Paul quotes Isaiah 52.7, “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” The feet of the herald of good news is an important idea for Paul. Part of the picture is that feet carry the herald to different places, where their message is to be proclaimed. Where will your feet carry you this week, and what difference would it make to see yourself as a herald of good news in those spaces?

So today, and day by day, may God help us to confess that Jesus is Lord, and to be bearers of the good news of the Gospel sharing it in our words and actions. Amen.

 *John Barr*