**Romans sermon series**

**7th April 2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Egelwin’s, Scalford.

**Reading: Easter 2 2023 Acts 4,32-35, Romans 12.1-8**

1. **Devotion**

Through the season of Lent, we have been following Andrew Ollerton’s book which studies Paul’s letter to the Romans. Its title is ‘Romans, A letter that makes sense of life’. Ollerton likens that progress through the letter with climbing a mountain. We have progressed uphill to the top learning about what it means to be a Christian. Now we are on the descent and are focussing on how to put this into practice.

He entitles chapter 12, the first part we heard this morning, The Descent of Devotion. You may wonder, as I do, why he calls it devotion. Does he mean devotion as in prayers, singing and all that goes on in church? Is he encouraging us to pay more attention to our worship, its style and holiness. Actually no! he uses the word devotion in its everyday context. That is like a relationship with another person. At a wedding service, the bride and groom are asked if they love their partner. My feelings were, I don’t just love her, I’m devoted to her.

For me, loving a person is a state of mind, a description of the relationship. Being devoted to a person is the consequence, in other words what actually happens in real terms, in day-to-day events.

In this Easter season, we are continuing to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was an event, it happened on the third day after his death on a cross. The consequences are with us today as much as they were with the disciples and all the early church. We heard in our reading from Acts how the new followers of Jesus, be they former Jews, Greeks or Gentiles, were changed.

Paul describes the change as a transformation. He urges the new followers in Rome, a city of iniquity, not to conform with those around them, not to follow in their footsteps of sin and debauchery. No, he urges them to transform themselves, start afresh with a completely new view of both themselves and their place in the world.

The roots of the word Transform are metamorphosis in Greek. Just as a caterpillar is changed or metamorphosed into a butterfly over a period of time, whilst it is in a chrysalis, so we are to change into a completely different sort of person. It won’t be an instant change, it takes time, but the result is just as dramatic and far reaching.

For much of my life, our bishop was John Sentamu as we lived in Yorkshire. On one occasion, I recall him telling the congregation not to think of themselves as volunteer Christians. A volunteer is someone who signs up to carry out a task, for example service in a community welfare project or soup kitchen. A Christian is someone who has transformed their way of life. It is a total change, a 100% commitment, a full time affair.

This has its consequences which are both overpowering and empowering. Overpowering in that we no longer conform to the society in which we live. We are indeed outcasts, oddballs, exceptions to the rule. We may well be in the minority. We do not just love our neighbour as ourselves, we are devoted to them, caring for their every need in whichever way we are able.

It is empowering because it is catching. We change the way other people live. Our whole society is based on Christian values though you might think that this is changing. But it is a stable society, democratic, caring and egalitarian.

Paul accepts that we are all different from each other, having differing skills and talents. He recognises this and at the same time urges us to value the differences that exist amongst us. It is not a case of some are better than others, not at all. Paul uses his familiar analogy of the body to describe the new society in which we live. The list is not hierarchical for without eyes, we couldn’t see, without ears we couldn’t hear, and so on. We need all the different skills people have to offer.

A week on Thursday, April 17th, we have our annual church meeting when we share how the last year has been, what we want to do in the coming year and choose who we are going to put our trust in to bring it about. It is an opportunity to not ‘volunteer’ but to put into practice what ‘transformation’ is all about.

This isn’t anything new in the Christian church, or body of Christ. We heard about it in our reading from Acts. Barnabus, a Levite from Cyprus, sold a field which he owned, brought the money and gave it to the apostles. The detail of that, his name, how he came to have the money, what he did with it, such detail is solid evidence that it happened. I wonder if, in the unwritten history of our time, something could be recalled about each and everyone of us. We have been transformed but what have been the consequences. Paul gives us some ideas in the remaining chapters of his letter to the Romans.