

Sunday 9th July – 8am, St Johns and CTK

Zechariah 9:9-12

Romans 7:15-25a

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-end

When we have a baptism service (here in) St James – as we will later this morning - the Bible Reading we most often use is the one where Jesus welcomes children to come to him, where he chastises his disciples as they try to turn them away. It seems very fitting as we welcome a small child to tentatively take their first steps on their journey of faith. Jesus says elsewhere that we need to be like children in the way we trust him and accept his teaching.

And here in today's gospel he is talking about children again.

'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

*"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."*

This time he has been observing children at play and he sees that the way they behave reflects the way we all behave; the way life is. Awkward, contrary – we might even say bloody minded.

When one child suggests something, the others say no. They are being awkward.

I suppose it reflects too that age old law of life – Murphys Law which basically says anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

examples – clearing out a gutter and finding a wasps nest
using the hedge trimmer and cutting thru the cable

And of course we know that we live in a world where things do go wrong – all the time; where people disagree; where mistakes happen; where tragedy strikes.

Our second reading today is from Paul's letter to the Romans - and today we have read from a version called "The Message" which is not an exact translation of the Greek, but a paraphrase. It tries to get to the meaning of the text not on a word for word basis, but rather it tries to make sense of the phrases in ways that we can easily understand.

And let's face it – with Paul's letters we need all the help we can get.

IN that reading from Romans Paul is reflecting on his own life, and how contrary it is. Maybe we can relate to what he is saying as he thinks about his struggles to do what he knows he should be doing

I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time

Murphys law in action in his (and I believe I our) lives.

What we want and what we actually do or think are totally different. Perhaps we set ourselves great ideals of following the Christian way, but we find it hard to stick to them. And after trying and failing time and time again we reach the conclusion that living out a good Christian life, trying to follow Jesus is downright difficult, despite him saying in the gospel that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Someone cuts us up at the Stratford Road junction and, no matter how hard we try, we find ourselves cursing them.

Someone for the umpteenth times leaves the kitchen in a mess, and we get snappy (or worse) with them.

We make a decision to be more welcoming and to talk to the new person at church, yet we once again find ourselves talking to those we've known for years while the new person stands on their own.

Does this just lead us to despair? Is this Christian life actually achievable in any sense? Are we just like Paul when he says ²⁴ *I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me?*

But Paul continues *The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.*

So how does that work?

Last week Richard spoke about his love for Wimbledon. Perhaps your sport of choice is cricket, or golf or football or rugby. Whatever it is, those who are at the top of their sport don't try to solve all their own problems. Each star and each team has coaches who work with them to help them play better and more efficiently; to encourage them and show them by example.

A golfer is coached to improve their golf swing; a bowler in cricket to improve their action; a goalkeeper in techniques to save a penalty.

We know from our own experience – just as Paul did - that by sheer will power we are not able to stop ourselves being snappy, or selfish or whatever it is. We need help.

And that's where Jesus comes in.

By his life he sets an example of how to live; through his death he makes forgiveness possible and through his resurrection he opens the way to a new and fulfilled life. He promises that he will always be with us; and he sends us his Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God within us – changing us, guiding us, helping us, encouraging us, teaching us. Sometime he speaks through the Bible (and if you find the Bible hard to understand think about coming along on 22nd July to our Opening the Book morning); sometimes he speaks through other people - friends, preachers, even strangers. Sometimes he speaks through circumstances.

Sometimes he speaks with an inner voice, or by bringing a thought into our minds. Sometimes by something we read or see or encounter. He speaks in many many ways

And through what the Spirit says and by his power within us he can change us. Slowly but surely he will change us and help us to live lives more like Jesus. To produce good fruit. Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The more we recognise the presence and the power of God in us through his Spirit the more we will produce this kind of fruit in the way we live and the more the Spirit will help us make those good choices Good choices that will come more naturally without the struggle we have now.

This is I believe what Paul was talking about

SO perhaps when we look at those words that came at the end of the gospel reading *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* we should accept that change in the way we live comes not through our struggles and striving, but through the transforming power of God and his Holy Spirit within us.