**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**June 14th – The First Sunday after Trinity**

**‘All roads lead to Romans’ (Romans 5:1-8)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I’m pleased to say that – whilst we’ve recently adapted ourselves pretty well into a largely ‘online Benefice’ – we can now start making first steps back into our church buildings. We’re able, from Monday June 15th, to open in a limited way, and so we’ve drawn up a ‘rota’ between our six churches, between Mondays and Saturdays. Our buildings will be open for private prayer only, whilst still adhering to social distancing and hygiene regulations. Details of locations and times are on publicity at the churches, on the Cranmer Group website, or can be obtained from your Wardens.*

*We’re again following our virtual service on Sunday mornings with an opportunity to catch-up with our friends across the Benefice. The service will be available online on Sunday from 9.30AM. Then, at 10.15AM, we’ll join together in a videoconference on Zoom. For those of you without internet access, you can still join our chat on Zoom, by phone. Call 0131 460 1196. Then key into your phone the meeting ID (864 0083 1074 #) & password (549794 #). Do join us!*

*May our loving God bless you greatly this coming week.*

*Yours in Christ,*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

**The Collect for the First Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

God of truth,
help us to keep your law of love
and to walk in ways of wisdom,
that we may find true life
in Jesus Christ your Son.
**Amen.**

**Holy, Holy, Holy
Played by Deb Hubbard**

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber
**Bible Reading: Romans 5:1-8 (New International Version)**

**Read by Roger Coulter**

***Peace and Hope***

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

*6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Sermon: ‘All Roads Lead to Romans’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**

In my first year of ‘vicar school’, I recall - a bit embarrassedly – being at the start of a lecture on St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. Our tutor strode into the room, assembled his papers on the lectern at the front of the classroom, and as he gathered his own thoughts, said to us, “Turn to the person next to you, and tell them what is so important to you about the Book of Romans.”

That Monday, I was sitting next to one of my good friends, who turned out to be the top scholar in our cohort by the end of the three years. She proceeded to gush at me about how amazing she found the Book; how central Romans had been to her sense of calling towards ordination; and how it was a central part of scripture for her personal Christian faith.

If you’re sitting at home now thinking, “I’m not really sure what I think about the Book of Romans; to be honest, I don’t think I’ve ever really looked at it that much; and I certainly couldn’t say, hand on heart, that it’s fundamental to why I’m a Christian”, I know where you’re coming from. That was me in that first-year class, in that lecture room, that morning.

Fortunately, Sarah’s boundless enthusiasm for Romans carried us virtually to the moment when our lecturer called us all to order again, so my mumblings weren’t too obviously superficial. But I still recall very clearly the feeling of “Oh my goodness, this is going to be awkward…” that I felt when the question was fired at us.

I wonder what all of you might say, if I were to ask the same question of you this morning? The good thing is that you too, having heard my confession, can make exactly the same sort of response as I did, and not feel embarrassed about it, since the fellow who’s now your Vicar did that too, and not that many years ago either!

So I hope that you’ll be glad to know (a) that I’m now really rather more familiar with St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans than I once was; and (b) I do believe that what Paul says about the Christian faith in these sixteen chapters can radically change our understanding of what being a Christian is all about, and especially of what God has done for us, in the person of Jesus Christ, that means our Christian faith really makes sense. We’re going to be following the Lectionary readings over the coming Sundays through Romans, and delving a bit deeper into what makes it central to the faith of so many Christians.

But if you also happen to be watching this film and you wouldn’t consider yourself to be a Christian - maybe a friend’s suggested you might like to have a look at our video services from the Cranmer Group, or maybe you’ve even just stumbled across it on the internet – I hope that you too will hear something in St. Paul’s words, and from them sense God inviting you to enter into a relationship with him, based on a love that is certainly beyond our human practice, and perhaps even beyond our human comprehension.

The message of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans has in fact been fundamental to the faith of a number of extraordinarily significant Christians. Martin Luther, the German monk who sparked the Protestant Reformation, saw in Romans the “justification by faith” - the reconciliation with God through our personal faith in him alone – that was the foundation-stone of that split from Roman Catholic Church, and the establishment of a whole new pattern of theological thought and church practice.

And, famously, too, the founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, on hearing a London preacher expound on Luther’s Commentary on Romans, felt his heart “strangely warmed”. Something stirred deep within him, that full acceptance in Christ - God's grace - was available to him; and from that point on, he travelled the length and breadth of England, preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to vast crowds, and leading tens of thousands to faith.

So what is this Good News, this Gospel, that we read in Paul’s letter to these early Roman Christians, and which has had such a profound effect, whether directly or indirectly, on the faith and life of so many?
The first thing that we see from today’s passage is the absolute CENTRALITY OF CHRIST to our relationship with God. The God who created us, wants nothing more than that we live our lives in relationship with Him.

Our Heavenly Father wants nothing more than that we turn away from all the ‘false gods’ – if you like – with which we’re surrounded in our lives. Idols that seek to make us dependent on them, and draw us away from the intimacy with Him for which every man, woman and child is created. And the way in which this re-connection with God comes about, is in the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God’s only Son, who willingly, out of pure love for humanity, came to this earth to be sacrificed on the Cross, only to defeat death and rise again on the Third Day.

Even though humanity turns away from God; even though each one of us - no matter how good we may be in human terms - does things that constantly grieve God’s heart; even with all of this, Jesus came to earth to die an agonizing death, that you and I might re reconciled with God.

So, first, our reading tells us of the centrality of Christ.

Second, it tells us of the SUFFICIENCY OF OUR SAVIOUR.

Paul expands greatly on this theme elsewhere. But, even in this passage where it’s not completely front and centre, it’s still absolutely clear that it’s not through “living a good life” (commendable though that is, and as much as it gladdens God’s heart when we do), that we come back into this intimacy with our Heavenly Father.

Jesus has done, on the Cross, all that is necessary. All we have to do is receive him into our lives, and believe and trust in him as our Lord and Saviour. And in doing so, we’ll receive - through him, as Paul says in v.1 - peace once again with our Creator.

So, first, our reading tells us of the centrality of Christ.

Second, it tells us of the sufficiency of our Saviour.

And, third, it tells us of the GENEROSITY OF GOD’S GRACE.

We can enter again into right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ alone, who - as verse 8 of our reading says, died for us “while we were still sinners”. At the heart of the Gospel is this extraordinary message, that God - for all that we do that grieves Him; for all that we turn away from Him; for all that we continue to do wrong towards Him and towards those around us – still extends his arms of welcome to us, in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

God’s grace cannot be earned. God’s grace is freely given to all. And God’s grace knows no limits. As the Christian author Philip Yancey has written in his book, What’s So Amazing About Grace, “There is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.” This truly is ‘Amazing Grace’; amazing grace which enables us, in Paul’s words, “to boast in the hope of the glory of God.”

These last few days have seen across the world, huge protests against specific and systemic injustices, especially racial injustices, both historic and present.

I believe it is right – as our Archbishops and Bishops have publicly said - that, as British Christians, we acknowledge we have been part of a society and a church which have not done enough to create a just, equitable and compassionate country and world, for all men, women and children. We have much on which to reflect; we have much - I strongly believe – of which it is right for us to repent.

But we also live in the certainty of the Gospel – that Christ came to earth that we might be saved; that, in him, all that’s necessary for salvation has already been achieved; and that, in him, the boundless generosity of our all-loving God comes alive for us all. Since we are each made by Him, in His image, no-one, no matter what we have done, is excluded from receiving his un-earnable grace, and - in so receiving - being brought back into relationship with him.

May we all, no matter how well - or not - we may know St. Paul’s letter to the Romans; no matter how much - or not - we may say that it’s been significant in our journey of faith up to this point; at least take this from this morning. Let us remember:

The centrality of Christ;

The sufficiency of our Saviour; and

The generosity of God’s grace.

And as we continue to explore this Epistle over the weeks to come, I pray that God’s word in the Letter will do a work in your heart, so that, in time, you too will feel able to say just how important Romans is to your personal faith as well.

In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Annie Dickinson**

Let us pray…

When I say “Lord, by your Grace” I invite you to say “May Thy Kingdom come.”

As we join together in prayer, let’s remember and reflect on the nature of our God.

Knowing that God is able to perform even what to us seems impossible; and remembering that he has demonstrated his power and his authority to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we reflect on the nature of God our Father, his power, His passion, and His unchangeable promises to mankind, let us us pray for His world…

We pray for His church throughout the world, remembering that in doing so we are not merely lifting up to Him a community, or a building or a denomination, but we are praying for every human being across the world who seeks His face, who clings to His love for them, who looks to Jesus Christ for their hope and who longs for God’s love and God’s mercy to be made real in the lives of all people.

Lord, by your Grace,
**may Thy Kingdom come.**

We pray for ourselves and for each other: Father God where we know fear replace it with your peace.

Father where we feel lonely or isolated replace it with the knowledge of your Presence and your love for each one of us.

And Father where we feel doubt replace it with confidence in your promises to each one of us in Jesus Christ.

Lord give us compassionate hearts, give us listening ears, give us generous spirits.

Lord, by your Grace,
**may Thy Kingdom come.**

We pray for the broken, for those experiencing persecution, for those who feel unloved or unvalued; we pray for the homeless, those who feel lost… and we pray especially this week for those caught up in conflict by racial division. Let us take a moment to remember why Jesus died for us, so that, to take a phrase from Martin Luther King, ‘peace and brotherhood may become a reality’.

So let us remember that, in God, all lives matter; to God all His children are sacred. And so Father we ask you to help all of us to bring peace and reconciliation wherever we find anger, or conflict, or fear. And we pray for a Spirit of peace and reconciliation to surround all those who currently feel division and anger and resentment.

Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others.

Open my ears that I may hear their cries.

Open my heart so that they may not be without help or support.

We ask all of these things in Jesus’ Name.

Lord, by your Grace,
**may Thy Kingdom come.
Amen.**

 **The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for the First Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

O God, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**All My Hope on God Is Founded
Played by Deborah Davies**

All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true.
God unknown,
He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust;
What with care and toil he buildeth,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
Hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom, passing thought:
Splendour, light, and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
From his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the Almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
At his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
One and all:
Ye who follow shall not fall.

Joachim Neander (trans. Robert Bridges)

**A Closing Blessing**

God the Holy Trinity make you strong
in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**