



# March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

*Welcome*

**14th Sunday after Trinity ~ 5th September 2021**

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at [andrew.marchurch@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.marchurch@gmail.com)

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*We are keeping services much the same; staying away if ill, wearing masks, washing hands and respecting distance. We have congregational singing for those wearing masks. We continue to keep people safe and to feel safe.*

~ Services with Social Distancing ~

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

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## Prayers

God of power and compassion, in Christ you reveal your will to heal and save. Open our ears to your redeeming word and move our hearts by the strength of your love, so that our every word and work may proclaim as Messiah Jesus the Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Lord of the changing, you help us find our voice that we might find our faith: we praise you for the gentile woman who answered back the Son of God; release us from the crowds which command our silence and free our tongues to demand from you the healing of the earth; through Jesus Christ, the opener of the gate. Amen

## James 2 v1-17

*My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?*

*You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, 'You shall not*

*commit adultery', also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

### **Gospel of St Mark 7 v24-37**

*Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'*

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### **Meditation**

Let us suppose you are in prison, and are offered your freedom on condition that you pay a heavy fine. The promise is real – so long as you can meet the precondition, the promise will be fulfilled. Pelagius (a British theologian and opponent of Augustine) and the scholars (of Luther's day) work on the proposition, initially shared by Luther, that you have the necessary money stacked away somewhere. As your freedom is worth far more, you are being offered a bargain. This presents no difficulties, so long as you have the necessary resources. Luther came to share the view (like St Augustine) – that sinful humanity just does not have the resources needed. So back to our prison story; Augustine and Luther work on the assumption that, as you do not have the money, the promise of freedom has little relevance to your situation. For both Augustine and Luther, therefore, the good news of the gospel is that you have been given the necessary money with which to buy your freedom. In other words, the precondition has been met for you by someone else. What you don't have has been provided by someone else. God graciously assists the sinner to gain their justification. The God of the Gospel is not a harsh judge who rewards individuals according to their merits, but a merciful and gracious God, something which they could never attain through their own efforts.

For Luther, God's justice had been defined by the Ten Commandments, which set an intimidating standard of conduct that was difficult, even impossible, to meet. The justice of God implied punishment for not obeying the law and that was bad news for sinners. If, however, God's justice was revealed in the gospel, then it was good news, since as Paul defined it, the gospel was the power of God that saved. God's justice was bad news if it was defined by the law, and good news if it was defined by the gospel, God's power to save.

But how did one access that saving power? By exercising human will-power or by receiving a divine gift? Eventually Luther comprehended from Paul: "I began to understand that God's justice meant that people who were just in God's sight lived by divine gift. It is the passive justice by which God justifies us through faith, 'They who through faith are just shall live' (Habakkuk 2v4) I felt I was altogether born again and had entered paradise through open gates." God's justice was a gift received in faith, not a product of human will-power. The faith in question was trust in God's mercy. God's justice was passive, not because it was inactive, but because it was a divine gift, God's grace not earned, even in part, by human strength or performance.

At the time, many regarded Luther's view as outrageous. It seemed to suggest that God had no morality, having no time for good works. Luther was branded as someone who had no place for the law in religious life – an anarchist. In fact, Luther is simply stating that Good Works are not the cause of justification, but are the result; "The

grace of God that justifies us for the sake of Christ through faith alone, without good works, while faith meanwhile abounds in good works.” Far from destroying morality, Luther saw himself as giving the proper context; the believer performed good works as an act of thankfulness to God for having forgiven him, rather than attempt to get God to forgive him in the first place.

Now, like last week, most of the above is my digestion from greater teachers. Note that last week I talked a lot about the ‘righteousness of God’, this week; God’s justice. They are the same words in Greek, but different English translations – which do you find more helpful? Now to the letter of James “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If ..... you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

Luther felt so affronted by the above, which seemed to contradict his great breakthrough. James saying that faith alone is not saving, it has to be faith which is lived out and shown forth. We may not feel they are in reality too far apart, for Luther was not saying that once you are saved, nothing more is asked, and James is saying that any authentic faith will be evidenced by actions. But I can safely leave you to ponder all this. For myself there are five points I wish to make for your consideration.

1. It is as if Luther, when climbing a mountain, only considers the journey uphill, not considering views from the summit, still less the descent. How we are saved/justified/made righteous is important, but it is the preparation for the agenda of living of life in Christ. Or, to put it other ways, Jesus died so that he may be risen; we are called to live in the light of the resurrection. Or, again, the Kingdom of God comes on earth as it is in heaven.

2. It seems to me that Luther focuses on the individual, and does not pay sufficient attention to salvation’s communal nature. Jesus asked us to baptise nations; the Old Testament is the story of God’s people Israel.

3. If we come across scripture we find hard, contradictory or difficult, the answer is to continue to wrestle, study, debate, not to discard or twist, nor to take small chunks out of context, literalistically, or to expect that all can simplistically be harmonised; scripture is the legacy of genuine wrestling by God with his people, and of his people wrestling with God.

4. ‘Justification by faith alone’ became a rallying cry of Protestantism. ‘Justification by grace through faith’ seems to be a clearer statement of the breakthrough. It seems ironic to me that sometimes, whether we put it in ‘thinking terms’ (intellectual ascent to Jesus as Lord) or ‘feeling terms’ (personal relationship with Jesus) we are in danger of placing people’s faith as a ‘work’ we achieve as a precondition for salvation. Also note that the word ‘alone’ is Luther’s and not Paul’s in the New Testament.

5. Finally, have you noticed in these two week’s readings, James goes on and on about wealth and the wealthy with a significant degree of hostility. How convenient is it for establishment Protestantism to marginalise this epistle of James. Or conversely, can we see that capitalistic society does indeed have roots in establishment Protestantism.

Well, maybe more next week, or maybe I’ll give you a break!

**God bless, Andrew**

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**Prayers**

*Let us pray for the whole state of Christ’s Church militant here on earth.*

Almighty and everlasting God, who by thy holy Apostle hast taught us to make prayers and supplications, and to give thanks for all men:

We humbly beseech thee most mercifully (to accept our alms and oblations, and) to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto thy Divine Majesty; beseeching thee to inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord: And grant, that all they that do confess thy holy Name may agree in the truth of thy holy Word, and live in unity and godly love.

We beseech thee also to save and defend all Christian Kings, Princes, and Governors; and especially thy servant ELIZABETH our Queen; that under her we may be godly and quietly governed: And grant unto her whole Council, and all that are put in authority under her, that they may truly and indifferently minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of thy true religion and virtue.

Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all Bishops (especially Stephen and Dagmar) and Curates, that they may both by their life and doctrine set forth thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer thy holy Sacraments:

And to all thy people give thy heavenly grace, and specially to this congregation here present; that, with meek heart and true reverence, they may hear, and receive thy holy Word; truly serving thee in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life. And we most humbly beseech thee of thy goodness, O Lord, to comfort and succour all them, who in this transitory life are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity.

And we bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; beseeching thee to give us grace to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of this heavenly kingdom: grant this, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate.

AMEN.