

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 5th July 2026
The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness
and truth to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Zechariah 9:9-12

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Psalm 145

The response to the Psalm is:
The Lord is loving to everyone.

Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin

that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

‘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.”

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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.’

Post Communion

Grant, O Lord, we beseech you,
that the course of this world
may be so peaceably ordered by your governance,
that your Church may joyfully serve you in all godly quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon

When I was about fifteen years old, I had my entire life planned out. I was that kind of person. I knew that I would get good exam results, so I would be going to university to study law. I would then become a successful barrister, putting right the wrongs of society and ensuring that justice was done. And it goes without saying that I would meet the man of my dreams, have a family and live happily ever after.

It turns out that life doesn't quite work out like that – the best laid plans, and all that. Even if you are not that kind of planner, there was definitely something about the pandemic that called into question our abilities to make any kinds of plans for the future. Within the church context the most striking example of this was weddings. It felt as though brides and grooms had simply never imagined it could be possible that the months of planning for their wedding could end up being completely wrecked by a global pandemic.

Individually, the fact that our plans do not always come to fruition, or at least not in the ways that we might imagine, is probably something that shapes us over time. I know that when I first set out on a career in my twenties there was something inside me that felt like I was looking for the right answer; a sense of certainty and clarity in the path that I had chosen. Over the years I have come to see things rather differently. It may be a cliché, but I do find that life is so much more about the journey than the destination. More than that, though, I find that my expectations and aspirations have changed. As a twenty-something year old I might have experienced people's different perspectives as somewhat obstructive to my own goals; I now find myself enriched by those differences. They may well be challenging, sometimes even frustrating. But I find that life is so much about our interactions with one another, and our relationship with God is shaped by those interactions, too. In my own experience the path that emerges is often so much more profound than the one I envisaged.

It is in this context that I hear the words both of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans and Jesus in the gospel reading. There are elements of both passages that are so very human. Whether or not you are the kind of person who lies awake at night worrying, I think that what Paul expresses is probably relatable to most of us. What I hear is something approaching hand

wringing. It is as though he is really clear about the “right” path – the one that he should be following. And yet there is something within him that leads him to do what he perceives to be the “wrong” thing. People have speculated endlessly about whether there was a particular issue with which Paul was wrestling. But I suspect that most of us can recognise something of his struggle. That moment when you say something cutting because you think it will feel good and then when you see the impact wish that you hadn’t. We all have examples of the times when we know deep down that we have shown the worst sides of ourselves. It helps me to know that Paul wrestled with these things, too.

When we look at the gospel reading, we see Jesus wrestling with something slightly different – but I think related. Jesus knew that everything that he did had a loving motivation. Because he was – and is – fully human and fully divine. What I think we see in this morning’s gospel reading is him behaving in both a fully human and a fully divine way. Let me explain.

As I say, Jesus knew that everything that he did was done out of love. So when John the Baptist sent his disciples to him, checking whether he was definitely the person John had been preparing the way for, Jesus is a little frustrated. It’s quite human to be frustrated. After all, everything that Jesus has done so far has been completely loving, generous and selfless. He has healed the sick; he has spent time with the outcast; he has told people how much they are loved. And still they are asking whether they can trust him. Whether he is what he says he is. It must, frankly, have been maddening.

And later in the reading the frustration continues. He expands on what he has been experiencing. God first sent John the Baptist as a prophet to prepare the way; he then sent Jesus, God’s own son. John the Baptist was quite austere – you will recall his diet of locusts and wild honey, not to mention the camel hair clothes. And what did people do? They criticised his asceticism, and he was imprisoned. Then Jesus came, challenging some of the strict religious rules by enjoying a party and healing people on the sabbath. And what did people do? They criticised his self-indulgence. Jesus’s point is that people seem hell bent on refusing to hear God’s word, however it is presented.

I wonder whether we might find ourselves sympathising just a little with Jesus. We have been running services for hundreds of years, seeking to be as welcoming as we can, and it seems that people aren't as interested in coming as they used to be. In more recent years we have tried all kinds of things. Community events; less formal services; social activities. Some have been quite successful; others less so. We can feel a little like we are trying to tell people all about how much God loves them, and somehow they don't seem to want to hear it.

And this is where I think the gospel reading can be so very helpful. After Jesus has aired his frustration, something else kicks in. Something that feels very like deep compassion and understanding for human frailty. Yes, he is frustrated that people fail to understand and fail to recognise God's love where they see it. And yet he also recognises that this really is part of our human nature. That, simple though it may be to know what really matters and follow that path, we often find ourselves agonising about what we should do, or whether we are doing the right thing. In the middle of that anguish, Jesus offers rest. He offers to take away our burdens. He asks us to place our concerns, worries and anxieties on him, because he can deal with them.

As we continue to move forward as a Ministry Area, perhaps the lessons of this morning's readings are particularly significant. They show compassion for those things that upset and concern us. Please, hear those words. If you feel weary, if you are carrying a heavy burden, Jesus invites you to come to him and lay your burden at his feet.

How easy it can be to feel that the salvation of the world is dependent on us. But it isn't. God has done that work for us. And that frees us up to play our part. It seems to me that none of us really knows what the church will look like in the future. We know that change is inevitable. But we don't really know what that change will look like.

But here's the thing. We may not be able to plan for the future in the ways that we might have thought. It is quite likely that the model of church attendance of previous years will not be replicated in years to come. But there are things that we know. We know that God loves us; that God loves all God's people. We know that we are called as disciples to share that

love in the communities in which we live. We know that we are called to listen; to care; to notice; to be people of hope. And it is my hunch that if we attend to those things – if we pray; if we care; if we reach out – we will actually live in to that future church. It may not look exactly as we might have expected – just as my life has not turned out exactly as my fifteen year old self might have thought. But if we remain faithful, the future that emerges will be shaped by God.

Amen