



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
7th Sunday after Trinity – Sermon for 10.00am 26th July 2020
Bible Readings: Romans 8: 26-end & St Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Heaven is like ...

After giving a sequence of parables to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven is like Jesus asks his disciples "Have you understood all this?" and they answer "Yes!"

Making sense of dense text ...

If only everything was as clear as when Jesus describes it; St Paul, bless him, is not always so understandable at first reading. If Paul had known when writing his Epistle just how that one word 'Predestination' would be hopelessly misinterpreted down the centuries, I'm sure he would either have chosen differently or provided further explanation. In fairness to Paul he was addressing his letter to provide hope to the persecuted young Roman Church, whereas we, thankfully, are not enduring persecution, hence, we view the Bible through our context and may misinterpret what is said. Let's remind ourselves of what Paul actually said:

"For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified."

And that means ...

At first hearing, it rather sounds as though God having predestined us to be formed in the likeness of his Son and so considered one of his family, we are called, justified and glorified automatically, therefore, why do we need to put any effort into our relationship with him if the outcome is guaranteed. After all, as an Internet definition says,

'Predestination is a belief that everything that happens has already been determined by God.'

It's not that simple: here's how our thinking can go wonky: God has a masterplan and we can't change it because he won't change it.

God certainly does have a masterplan for all humankind, after all he created us so, as Paul says, 'he foreknew' us. It's not his plan that's faulty, it's perfect and unchanging, it's the other participants in the plan that are faulty, chiefly, ourselves! Why? Because God has given us freedom of choice whether to accept or reject him.

How do we respond?

Do we answer his calling of us and serve? Or, do we reject his call? If the latter then we put ourselves outside his predestined plan. How do we know if we have put ourselves inside or outside the plan?

Paul gives us the clue when he prefaced his comments with:

‘We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.’

So, if, we love God with our whole heart and our neighbour as ourselves even though our love is imperfect, we fit into God’s plan, for God loves a repentant heart. If it is our heart’s desire to love him in a trusting way then we may call him Father. He makes our human frailty perfect through the death and resurrection of his Son.

There’s always a catch, isn’t there?

Fine! You might say, that’s all well and good when we are ultimately called to our eternal home of which Jesus has given a foretaste in his parables but for the time being, we are grubbing around on earth trying to make the best of things. Yes, but we can actually benefit from eternity now because Jesus left us his Holy Spirit for our comfort, as Paul says to “help us in our weakness.” The Holy Spirit is likely the most ignored person of the Holy Trinity but he is here ready to engage with us if we ask for his help.

Choices, choices

We have been wonderfully made by God and in giving us this world to call our temporary home, he has given us a glimpse of the wonders to come. Through his Son taking on our flesh he showed us a transformative way of living and by leaving his Spirit, here in lies our hope while we live on earth. Hope is a priceless commodity and the most positive of virtues because we are placing our trust in what is not seen and yet believe. Even if others in the world reject God’s plan, we can triumph through a fresh vision of God’s plan shown to us in Jesus Christ and that is the surest hope of all. The quality of our eternity comes down to how much effort we put in now communicating with God. Do we pray for his guidance, every day? Do we read the Bible to gain deeper insight, every day? Do we share our faith lovingly, everyday? If we do, we will have certainty, as Paul says,

‘For I am convinced ... that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

To get back where I started: Jesus asked his disciples, ‘Have you understood all this?’ Can we also answer “Yes!”

Amen.