

WELCOME 12th June 2022 – 1 Pentecost/Trinity Sunday '22 C

Romans 1:1-7 & 1:13-32

Welcome! It's great to be together again....Pastor John is back in town from his trip to the US & is doing his best to recover from jet lag & wake up in the proper time zone! God blessed his time away & our prayers for safety were answered! Today Ladies Fellowship is sharing the worship leading & we're especially thankful to everyone who has filled in & picked up a few loose ends while John was away.

As we move into this week...Anyone who has ever cooked a meal or baked something knows sometimes you have to substitute ingredients. You don't have enough sugar...use caster sugar. You don't have buttermilk...stir some vinegar through your milk & wait. One of the kids brings home a friend who stays for dinner you go to plan B to have enough to feed everyone at the table...more veggies or something filling as a side dish...

The Bible is clear: for God there is no Plan B. There are no substitutes. God created a universe of beauty & majesty & wonder for us to enjoy in relationship with him. It was always to be that way. God with us...us with God. All. The. Time.

Sin crushed that from our perspective. Alienated us from the Father. Created enmity among humans. Separated us from the delight & harmony of God's created order & allowed death to steal stalk & haunt the living joy right out of us & plant fear in its place. The world we inhabit lives in that sin-crushed place.

But God knew all along he would allow the death of his one & only Son Jesus to retrieve restore & reconcile what looked to be lost forever. It was always the plan that the Father would pursue each of us with a passionate suffering love so we might enjoy the fruits of eternity in his presence.

No one tells the gospel...and that's what that is...better than Paul. He was the church's worst enemy until Jesus transformed him into its greatest apostle & most fervent advocate. In Jesus, God comes personally to us, to rescue & renew all things by Christ's life, death & resurrection.

For the next 8 weeks we're going to climb inside the mind & heart of Paul as he speaks the gospel to the Roman church, to his Jewish former friends & to the unbelieving world with a word of hope, a promise of life & the gift of salvation in Jesus. Today he exposes us to the gospel: **“the power of God at work saving everyone who believes...”**

We'll explore & experience that together...Let's pray, sing & then hear God's Word.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

All:

Holy Spirit of life, enflame me with passion for the good news. Let my voice ring with the hope & promise of Christ.

Holy Spirit of Love, immerse me in compassion & kindness. May my words bring comfort to those in need of consolation & relief.

Holy Spirit of grace, enlighten my mind & heart. Fill my speech with expressions of peace & understanding. Fill us today with the mind, heart & life of Jesus Christ. Amen

1 PENTECOST/TRINITY SUNDAY '22 C – OPERATION GOSPEL: GOSPEL EXPOSURE

Power...If there's a word folks all over the world understand or at least have a working definition...it's power. It's in evidence every day. **Political** power. Military power. Intellectual power. Economic power. Legal power. Social or cultural power. Environmental power. **Port Power**...just **kidding**.

The Romans appreciated power, just as much as we do. They conquered nations, built roads & cities, wrote laws & governed continents, created literature & art & education rivalled by none in their day. That's our conception of power. To force or coerce – achieve or acquire – take or hold – to build – to make - to do.

But that sort of power most often simply reinforces the brokenness of the world... They maintained a deliberate system of slavery. They enforced a tired society where rich & poor, slave & free, citizen & subject always knew who was whom & where they fit in the hierarchy. The Pax Romana (Peace of the Empire) was enforced by their boots on the throats of the subjugated masses.

At the same time we know their power was at times powerless: Powerless to make friends out of rivals. Powerless to raise up the lowly. Powerless to genuinely transform hearts or lives. Powerless to stop the diseases that ravaged their urban slums. Powerless to end political corruption & injustice. Ultimately...Rome was powerless against the moral rot, social & political decay, & invasions by those they hoped to conquer. Rome was powerless against time & ultimately fell into ruin. Their power like every empire before or since was fleeting & failed.

Which is why Paul's letter to the church in the heart of Rome must have felt like such a breath of fresh air... **I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first & also the Gentile.** For Paul to proclaim a power that in itself healed the division between Jew & Non-Jew would have seem like lightning had struck the Roman Senate. This power – this gospel/Good News is about Jesus...human by all earthly measures but **revealed** as the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. That the gospel is power greater than the grave means it's greater than Rome's power to kill, greater than disease's power to degrade & greater than the tomb to hold forever.

You are included among those Gentiles who have been **called to belong to Jesus Christ.** I am writing to all of you in Rome who are **loved by God** & are **called to be his own holy people.** May God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ give you **grace & peace.** Nowhere in any part of the Empire & among none of the gods they had worshipped were the words "love, grace, or peace" part of the vocabulary. None of the gods of the ancient world cared for humanity in such a personal benevolent fashion. No god, to whom

humans had ever given their devotion, was said to have a personal relationship with frail fragile people. (next 3 same slide)

In fact, every ancient **"religion"** & those we know as "religions" today on the world stage, lived true to the origin of that word. Religion comes from the Latin word **"religare"** (rel-i-gar-ray) which means **"to bind upon"**. To be engaged in "religion" is to be bound, like a load on a pack animal...But Paul says this good news about Christ, this gospel, not only promises love, grace, peace, belonging...a relationship with God, but rather than a burden that must be carried or accomplished...this gospel is a gift of righteousness or "worth before God" that is ours solely through faith...by trusting that Jesus is the one who establishes our worth in God's sight, who calls & welcomes us into this relationship with God...who calls & welcomes us in love, grace & peace.

And yes...of course God the Father of Jesus is powerful, but **God's** power is meant to reveal his good & gracious character...God's power is meant to demonstrate his wisdom & eternal goodness...to invite us to respond in harmony with his well-ordered bountiful creation. God created a universe of beauty & majesty & wonder for us to enjoy in relationship with him. It was always to be that way. God with us...us with God. All. The. Time. There's no excuse, Paul says...we should have known.

Sin crushed that from our perspective. Alienated us from the Father. Created enmity among humans. Separated us from the delight & harmony of God's created order & allowed death to steal stalk & haunt the living joy right out of us & plant fear in its place. The world we inhabit lives in that sin-crushed place.

There really are only 2 kinds of people in the world. Those who say to God, "Your will be done," & those to whom God says, "Ok...Have it your way." Paul describes sin & its effects as "God handing us over" to our rebellious desire to be god for ourselves. To our shameful desires, our shameful behaviour & our foolish thinking until the fabric of human life & the harmonies of all creation were distorted toward death. God's anger, his wrath against human rebellion & self-will ultimately spells death for all. Shame, hurt, pain & sadness in this life & separation from God in eternal death in the world to come.

But God knew all along he would allow the death of his one & only Son Jesus to retrieve restore & reconcile what looked to be lost forever. It was **always** the plan that the Father would pursue each of us with a passionate suffering love so we might enjoy the fruits of eternity in his presence.

Even before he made the world, God loved us & chose us in Christ to be holy & without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to

himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, & it gave him great pleasure. – Eph 1:4-5 God steps personally into this mess as one of us...In Jesus, God comes personally to us, to rescue & renew all things by Christ's life, death & resurrection. Jesus lives the life responsive to God we were designed to live. He lived pouring out love & hope & joy & restoration & offered life to anyone who wanted it...life at its best fullest most abundant. Showed us the very heart of the Father. He didn't hide from the brokenness or deny its power...He simply suffered it to destroy it. He died, like we do, but he rose from the grave & he walked out alive to demonstrate once & for all that God was going to have His world & His people the way he wanted us... filled with love & life & joy & hope & peace...forever.

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. – 2 Cor 5:19 The greatness of the gospel is that because of Jesus killed & raised...God has declared every last one of us his beloved children purely as a gift...by grace...and that grace is yours, mine, ours, everyone's by trusting that the death of Jesus is for you & the life he lives now beyond the reach of death is also yours because he has taken you into that great promise. Start to finish by faith.

This is good news...this is power greater than any this world can muster & makes an end to all the powers of this world. This is the power of God to save. It's the power of God to make right all that is wrong...to make new all that's broken. Especially us...God's most prized & loved creations...the only part of the created world that shares his image & is intended to live out his purposes here on earth.

Christ is risen. He rules over all...and the Father is working even now through his church by his Spirit to gather the lost, strengthen the faithful & share boldly the gift of life & joy that last forever. **I** am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first & also the Gentile. This power – this gospel/Good News is about Jesus...human by all earthly measures but **revealed** as the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is power greater than the grave, greater than time's power to wither, greater than disease's power to degrade & greater than the tomb to hold forever. And You...**You** are included among those Gentiles who have been **called to belong to Jesus Christ**. I am writing to all of you in Rome who are **loved by God** & are **called to be his own holy people**. May God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ give you **grace & peace**.

Let's close praying together

Heavenly Father, you made this promise: **"I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations."** Lord Jesus take over. Take all of me. You alone are my hope, my future, my security, my peace & my joy. Use my life so that your love is known and your life pours through me for the sake of those around me. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.