

## Sunday Sermon - 20.09.20

Delivered by Gemma Dashwood at St Thomas' North Ipswich

Last week I preached another student sermon at St Paul's, and my supervising priest informed me just before we started the service that my mark for my sermon would be based on how many of the congregation read their Bailiwicks as I spoke. What he hadn't banked on, however, is that at the start of my sermon I offered to buy everyone a beer if they (just this once!) put down their Bailiwicks and listened to me. In the interests of fairness, I am happy to make the same offer today!

As this is the first time I have preached at St Thomas', I'm going to share a little bit of personal information with you as we think about the readings today. Have any of you wondered why I limp? Well it's an unusual story – shortly after birth I got an infection in my hip which ultimately destroyed much of the joint and stopped my right leg from growing properly. The first 25 years or so of my life encompassed multiple operations, wheelchairs, crutches, walking sticks, hospital stays, tears, tantrums, and failures. But you know what? I got there in the end and managed to learn how to walk. And you know what else? I'm not sure I would want it any differently if I had my life over again. All of that stuff shaped me, changed me, challenged me, and I have a perspective on life that I feel privileged to experience.

In all of the readings today, people have ended up in circumstances which were not ideal for them. The Israelites, having been victorious at escaping through the red sea, now found themselves stuck in the wilderness. Paul is in prison openly admitting that he would prefer to be dead if he had the choice. And the workers who worked a full day's work only to find that their payment is the same as those workers who worked only one hour are clearly a bit miffed, and wondering how on earth God could be that unfair to them.

Paul says it outright in [Phil. 1:12](#) "I want you to know, beloved that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel". Imagine if we take every challenge, everything that has gone wrong in our lives, everything we wish hadn't have happened and apply that statement to it – that everything that has happened to us has helped us to spread the gospel. Makes the bad stuff seem a bit different, doesn't it? God has ways of using us to spread his love and gospel that we may not immediately see or understand, but nevertheless, the opportunities are there. That's one of the gifts of being a Christian.

Paul also reminds us in Philippians that suffering for Christ is actually a privilege - [[Philippians 29](#) *For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—* ] Again, this is not necessarily an easy concept to accept on face value, but Paul has a valid point. If our lives weren't difficult, and if there was no sacrifice involved, then it would mean nothing. Having a relationship with God and receiving God's love is such an immense benefit that suffering for it is really nothing to complain about.

Part of this suffering we are in fact so lucky to endure is also found in situations which we might feel are unjust. Matthew 15 reminds us that the employer (otherwise known as God) asks “Are you envious because I am generous?” Sure, it may seem unfair that the workers who worked only one hour got the same as those who worked the whole day. (I for one have been known to complain about colleagues at work who don’t pull their weight!) But actually, it is not our place to judge that. The full day workers got what they were owed – they weren’t cheated in any way. Also, before we cry shouts of foul play, we should be careful what we wish against others – you never know when we too might need a bit of generosity – next time it might be us in a sticky position, when a gift from God might just save the day (or maybe I might be having a bad day at work and someone taking an extra load from me might help me get through it).

And this brings us to another point that Paul makes - we don’t need to always put ourselves first, because God is there to care for us. We don’t need to worry about being in a difficult, painful or stressful situation, because we can hold on to our faith and know that we have the strength of God to draw on. We can offer up our concerns, our worries, our frustrations to God. The Exodus reading reminds us that God does hear our complaining, even if we don’t think we are being listened to. And more importantly still, we know that God will love us, despite everything.

Additionally, I think what we are also being taught in these readings is not to judge our lives by comparing them with others. How often do we look at those around us and marvel at how simple their lives are compared to ours, how easy they have it, how lucky they seem to be? But we have no control over the lives of others, we can only change what we do. Moreover, we can choose how much difference we might care to make to other people’s lives.

I’m going to share one other personal story. During one of my longer hospital stays, I had just been taken out of traction after spending five weeks being strapped to the bed. I was told that I was allowed to go outside if I wanted. The only problem was I couldn’t walk and didn’t have a wheelchair. I badly wanted to go and see the sky again. One of the other girls in my ward realised my conundrum and offered me the use of her wheelchair for the morning – she said she was happy to stay in bed until I got back. And I will never ever forget what it was like going outside into the sun, feeling the warmth on my back and rejoicing in God’s gift of nature. It was only later I found out that earlier that morning that girl had been given a terminal diagnosis – she was ten at the time. Even through her fear and grief, she realised that she could do something to help others. She may have had a rough deal on earth, but I’m sure she was attended to first when she entered heaven.

And so, when we put all of that together, where does that leave us? I think that we are being reminded that our job as Christians is to live our lives the best we possibly can, and that means using every opportunity – even the bad ones – to further the Gospel which has been entrusted to us. And by doing this, we can remember that we are not the main centre of attention – that position belongs only to God.

Amen

## Exodus 16:2-15

**Ex. 16:2** The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

**Ex. 16:4** Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." <sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" <sup>8</sup> And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

**Ex. 16:9** Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" <sup>10</sup> And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup> "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

## Ps 105:1-6, 37-45

### Psa. 105:1

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.  
<sup>2</sup> Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.  
<sup>3</sup> Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.  
<sup>4</sup> Seek the LORD and his strength;  
seek his presence continually.  
<sup>5</sup> Remember the wonderful works he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,  
<sup>6</sup> O offspring of his servant Abraham,  
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

### Psa. 105:37

Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,  
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.  
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,  
for dread of them had fallen upon it.  
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,  
and fire to give light by night.  
40 They asked, and he brought quails,  
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.  
41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;  
it flowed through the desert like a river.  
42 For he remembered his holy promise,  
and Abraham, his servant.

### Psa. 105:43

So he brought his people out with joy,  
his chosen ones with singing.  
44 He gave them the lands of the nations,  
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,  
45 that they might keep his statutes  
and observe his laws.  
Praise the LORD!

### Philippians 1 (21:30)

**Phil. 1:1** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,  
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

**Phil. 1:2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Phil. 1:3** I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup> to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup> having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

**Phil. 1:12** I want you to know, beloved that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; <sup>14</sup> and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

**Phil. 1:15** Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. <sup>16</sup> These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; <sup>17</sup> the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. <sup>18</sup> What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup> It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

<sup>21</sup> For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; <sup>24</sup> but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. <sup>25</sup> Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, <sup>26</sup> so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

**Phil. 1:27** Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. <sup>29</sup> For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— <sup>30</sup> since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

### Matthew 20:1-16

**Matt. 20:1** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; <sup>4</sup> and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. <sup>5</sup> When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ <sup>7</sup> They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ <sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”