

**Sermon preached by the Rev'd Cynthia Jackson, Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2016, St. Mary's Wimbledon, Trinity 9.**

St. Paul wrote words of encouragement to Christians in the early church through what we now know as Epistles or letters. The accounts of his own suffering are well recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. He knew only too well what it was to be cast down, to be beaten, imprisoned, thrown out of cities and ship wrecked. But he gives us words of reassurance in his letter to the Romans chapter 8: 37-38:

*"... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, no depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

These words are encouraging to us today. We listen day by day to the horrific events that are happening throughout the world, whether it be the shootings in Nice, Munich, Baghdad or the United States of America. We can get weighed down by the daily burden of disasters and tragedies that have been poured down upon us. We can feel completely powerless and downcast.

St. Paul knew that through the disasters he suffered he could do nothing in his own strength. By the grace of God and putting his trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, he was given strength and hope for the future. We can share that trust too.

St. Paul encourages us just as he encouraged the Christians in his letter to the Colossians:

*"...As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving..."*

Paul goes on to say:

*"..... When you were buried with Christ in baptism you'll also raised with him through faith in the power of God..."*

These words are true for us all so today. This faith is renewed every time we receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are transformed by him and empowered by him.

So when we feel cast down by the disasters and human tragedies in the world we know that it is possible for lives to be transformed. We can be part of that transformation. This service of Holy Communion empowers us to make a difference. We are the body of Christ here on earth, here in Wimbledon. Each one of us can make a difference in our own way. We do not have to go to be missionaries in a foreign country to witness to Christ in the world we can do it where we are, each in our own way.

What we all can do is to pray whatever our age. When we are older, we may not be so active in our witness to Christ but we can pray. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray and he taught them the words of the Lord's Prayer, words very familiar to us. If all we have time for each day is to say the Lord's Prayer quietly, slowly and reflectively that is a very good start to a time of prayer.

Jesus knew that God his father was a generous God as he reminds his hearers in the Gospel parable we heard today. God is the generous friend who gets up out of his bed to help his friend although he would rather have ignored his knocking at the door. Jesus he tells his hearers ,...

*' to ask and they will receive, knock and the door will be opened to them...'*

In 2016 people often want instant gratification and do not like the idea of waiting for anything. I read a lovely 'postit' in a Parish magazine which read:

**GOD'S  
3 answers  
TO your PRAYERS:  
1: YES  
2: NOT YET.  
3: I have SOMETHING  
BETTER in mind.**

Many people find prayer difficult. Prayer is a conversation with God like a conversation between two people. We can imagine ourselves meeting a close friend. One of us talks and the other listens then we swap over. It is two-way conversation. If one friend talked all the time then it is not a dialogue it is a monologue. Michel Quoist , in his book '*Prayers of Life*', wrote the following:

***'The Telephone'***

*I have just hung up; why did he telephone?  
I don't know...Oh! I get it....  
Forgive me, Lord, it was a monologue and not a dialogue.  
I explained my idea and did not get his;  
Since I didn't listen, I learned nothing,  
Since I didn't listen, I didn't help,  
Since I didn't listen, we didn't communicate.*

*Forgive me, Lord, for we were connected,  
and now we are cut off.*

We need perseverance in prayer. Jesus prayed constantly whenever he had difficult situations to face; during his temptations in the wilderness, before choosing his disciples, whenever he knew he was to face stressful encounters. Jesus withdrew, he set himself apart, to get close to God his father.

We have been extremely fortunate in having had Christopher Chapman as the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Adviser and we are going to miss him now that he has left the Diocese. Through his Quiet Days and Retreats, through his *Spirituality Newsletter* many people have benefitted from his expertise in prayer and many aspects of spirituality. He produced many helpful handouts and aids to pray and I have used them myself when leading Quiet Mornings or days of guided prayer. Like learning a language when we buy a book or a CD we often need an aid to prayer. We need guidance and signposts.

I am always happy to provide anyone in the congregation with prayer material or aids to prayer if they ask me.

The power of prayer is immense. Each individual person that prays is linked up with other praying Christians. As Christians we are not on our own, we are members of the world-wide Christian Church. We are part of a power-house of prayer that gets its strength from Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore let us not be overwhelmed by the news of hatred and strife in the world but hold onto the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu- '*Victory is Ours*':

*' Goodness is stronger than evil,  
Love is stronger than hate,  
Light is stronger than darkness,  
Life is stronger than death,  
Victory is ours through him who loves us'*

*(An African Prayer Book )*