

Good morning everyone,

The readings for this 'First Sunday after Trinity' focus on the reality of good and evil, and particularly the dilemma we face as human beings in having to choose between right and wrong, or, in spiritual terms, the path of life or death. All too frequently human beings have made the wrong choice and suffered the consequences.

Genesis 3: 8 – 15. This is often the first reading at a full service of nine lessons and carols at Christmas indicating the beginning of humanity's predicament which would result in the coming of Jesus as its Saviour. It is the story of Adam and Eve, who represent the human race. They gave in to the temptation of the serpent or snake (not to be identified with 'Satan' or 'the Devil' – such a personification of evil had not been thought of when the Genesis story was being written). When confronted by God about how they know they are naked, having eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the snake. There is truth about human frailty aplenty in this ancient story. It is a parable about such weaknesses and the dire consequences of following one's own will and desires rather than the will and ways of God. It leads to the conviction that humanity would ultimately need a Saviour to rescue it from the pit which it had dug for itself, and so lead it back to the paradise which was God's intention for it from the beginning.

2 Corinthians 4: 13 – 5: 1. For Paul, the way of Adam (though he is not mentioned in this passage), human nature, disobedience to God, is the way of death, whereas Christ is the way of life. Here, Paul states how he carries the death and resurrection of Christ within him every day, another way of saying that he is being transformed into Christ-likeness. In spite of all his hardships he is sustained and renewed by the life of God within him, he is in the process of being raised with Christ now while looking forward to the full resurrection that awaits once the process of bodily decay has run its course. Whatever befalls us in this transitory life, our inner or spiritual self is being renewed day by day as we follow Jesus in his death and resurrection, and by God's grace we are on a journey towards its fulfilment.

Mark 3: 20 – 35 There are two interconnected stories in this passage. The main thrust is about family and unity. A divided house (or family) will surely collapse. So the divided attitudes towards Jesus and what he represents are potentially disastrous for Israel. If people recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus, but refuse to acknowledge it, they are actively opposing God. This is sin against the Holy Spirit, and it is fatal! This scene and message are sandwiched by the appearance of Jesus' own family members who turn up with the intention

of taking him away because he appears to be ‘out of his mind.’ They may have been influenced by those who said that he was possessed by evil spirits. Jesus uses their presence to teach that those who gather round him and accept his teaching and mission are his true family. This is a challenging message outlining that following Jesus creates a deeper bond and commitment than even with one’s human family.

A prayer for this Sunday:

God our Father, we experience within us and around us the ongoing struggle between good and evil. Help us to recognize the wrong we have done, and the temptations we have fallen into. Give us faith in your immeasurable mercy and bring us the joy and peace of your pardon. May the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus make us die to sin and rise in him, and overcome with him all evil in ourselves and in the world. We ask this in his name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Have a good Sunday, and every blessing for the week ahead.

Love and prayers,

John

