

Sermon and readings for Proper 9, Sunday 9 July 2023

Readings

[Zechariah 9.9-12](#)

[Romans 7.15-25a](#)

[Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock, and our Redeemer.

In our Old Testament reading from Zechariah today we have a look into the future as Zechariah writes of the coming of the future ruler of the kingdom of peace. Not that the king will bring peace, rather he will inherit it. He who comes (he is stated to be a king) will come riding on a donkey, on a colt (certainly in modern usage a male), the foal of a donkey. And their dominion will be all the then known world. See our Palm Sunday service at the start of Holy Week if you would like to refresh your memory.

I'm worried by the way that militaristic imagery creeps into our worship. My father was a truly awful amateur pianist, and he had a song book the last song of which was the old imperial czarist Russian national anthem. It included the words 'when the Czar rides out to battle God Thunders on his side'. It was completely oblivious to the fact that the opposition were probably singing the equivalent words in their own language.

And Paul Writing to the Romans. people he may only know indirectly describes a very Human Condition. How often have you found yourself unable to do what you know to be the right thing, and instead do what you know to be wrong? Paul writes 'So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand'. Paul is clear that the only way out of this situation is through Christ.

Our Gospel is a split reading and I have many times told you to read what is omitted. Sometimes it is of no interest, occasionally it may be just plain boring, at other times it can be very significant. Here it is the cities around the sea of galilee which are referred to, so it is not relevant here. The short parable about "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." which opens the reading is difficult to interpret, most probably the Children are Jesus and John the Baptist and the 'others' are the Palestinians of the time who reject both ways, the severe way of John and the less rigorous way of Jesus, both of whom are children of wisdom a female person.

The verse in our Gospel where Jesus claims his special relationship with the Father starts with a typical Jewish Invocation modified by Jesus use of the intimate *Abba* -Father, form which helps to clarify His self-understanding, and has been seen as the basis for all of future Christology-the study of Jesus as a branch of Theology. And the previous verse has been the basis for theories of election which have been held responsible for nervous breakdowns as well as some and in some views scurrilous poetry. I'm thinking specifically of **Holy Willie's Prayer** by Robert Burns often seen as the Scots national poet though like many poets he speaks to humanity more widely. If you don't know it, I've given it in full at the end of this sermon.

And what of 'a glutton and a drunkard' in the Gospel, by comparison with 'He has a demon' It seems to me that here Jesus is being scathing in his judgement about the dual standards that he saw around him.

The word 'Infant' in our Gospel s is a reference to the uneducated, to whom the simple Gospel, with its simple demands has come, as distinct from those who would claim to be wise and intelligent in their own sight and have not received the gospel and acted on it

2 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' Is a reference to the burden of the six hundred or more commandments which observant Jews (and Pharisees?) should follow, in contrast to Jesus two Great Commandments, all the rest being commentary. But on a road which leads to the cross? Let's not forget that the cross was an instrument of Torture to death. The Roman Empire like many Empires before and, sadly, since, used pain and death as a way of ensuring compliance. It seems that the comparison is quantity, against quality two commandments as against over six hundred.

All I can say in finishing is good luck in taking up your yoke which I hope does not lead to pain and death.

Amen

O Thou that in the Heavens does dwell!

Wha, as it pleases best thyself,

Sends ane to Heaven and ten to Hell,

A' for Thy glory!

And no for ony gude or ill

They've done before Thee.—

I bless and praise Thy matchless might,

When thousands Thou has left in night,

That I here before Thy sight,

For gifts and grace,

A burning and a shining light

To a' this place.—

What was I, or my generation,

That I should get such exaltation?

I, wha deserv'd most just damnation,

For broken laws

Sax thousand years ere my creation,

Thro' Adam's cause!

When from my mother's womb I fell,
Thou might hae plunged me deep in hell,
To gnash my gooms, and weep, and wail,
In burning lakes,
Where damned devils roar and yell
Chain'd to their stakes.—

Yet I am here, a chosen sample,
To shew Thy grace is great and ample:
I'm here, a pillar o' Thy temple
Strong as a rock,
A guide, a ruler and example
To a' Thy flock.—

[O Lord thou kens what zeal I bear,
When drinkers drink, and swearers swear,
And singin' there, and dancin' here,
Wi' great an' sma';
For I am keepet by the fear,
Free frae them a'.—]

But yet—O Lord—confess I must—
At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust;
And sometimes too, in wardly trust
Vile Self gets in;
But Thou remembers we are dust,
Defil'd wi' sin.—

O Lord—yestreen—thou kens—wi' Meg—
Thy pardon I sincerely beg!
O may 't ne'er be a living plague,
To my dishonor!

And I'll ne'er lift a lawless leg
Again upon her.—

Besides, I farther maun avow,
Wi' Leezie's lass, three times—I trow—
But L—d, that friday I was fou
When I cam near her;
Or else, Thou kens, thy servant true
Wad never steer her.—

Maybe Thou lets this fleshy thorn
Buffet Thy servant e'en and morn,
Lest he o'er proud and high should turn,
That he's sae gifted;
If sae, thy hand maun e'en be borne
Untill Thou lift it.—

Lord bless Thy Chosen in this place,
For here Thou has a chosen race:
But God, confound their stubborn face,
And blast their name,
Wha bring thy rulers to disgrace
And open shame.—

Lord mind Gaun Hamilton's deserts!
He drinks, and swears, and plays at cartes,
Yet has sae mony taking arts
Wi' Great and Sma',
Frae God's ain priest the people's hearts
He steals awa.—

And when we chasten'd him therefore,

Thou kens how he bred sic a splore,
And set the world in a roar
O' laughin at us:
Curse Thou his basket and his store,
Kail and potatoes.—

Lord hear my earnest cry and prayer
Against that Presbytry of Ayr!
Thy strong right hand, Lord, mak it bare
Upon their heads!
Lord visit them, and dinna spare,
For their misdeeds!

O Lord my God, that glib-tongu'd Aiken!
My very heart and flesh are quaking
To think how I sat, sweating and shaking,
An' pish'd wi' dread,
While Auld wi' hingin lip gaed sneaking
And hid his head!

Lord, in thy day o' vengeance try him!
Lord visit him that did employ him!
And pass not in thy mercy by them,
Nor hear their prayer;
But for thy people's sake destroy them,
An' dinna spare!

But Lord, remember me and mine
Wi' mercies temporal and divine!
That I for grace and gear may shine,
Excell'd by nane!
And a' the glory shall be thine!

Amen! Amen!

Robert Burns