

“1 The Lord says, "Listen to me, you that want to be saved, you that come to me for help. Think of the rock from which you came, the quarry from which you were cut.”

The readings today for your perusal are Isaiah 51: 1-6, Romans 12: 1-8 and Matthew 16: 13-20.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

“1 The Lord says, "Listen to me, you that want to be saved, you that come to me for help. Think of the rock from which you came, the quarry from which you were cut.”

The readings today relate to the past and our traditions especially in relation to our service to God. All who we are comes from faith, which in turn comes from hearing God’s message. The writer of Isaiah is quite clear about this for he tells us to listen and to

2 Think of your ancestor, Abraham, and of Sarah, from whom you are descended. When I called Abraham, he was childless, but I blessed him and gave him children; I made his descendants numerous...4 Listen to me, my people, listen to what I say:”

The two Old Testament readings relate to the past or tradition. Isaiah encourages the people to remember their story, suggesting that it is by understanding their history and tradition, especially the way in which God has acted in that story, that the Israelites can truly understand who they are and from there we can get a better understanding of who we are and what our role is in this modern world. It is by remembering our past that we can look to the future with hope, after all “...give my teaching to the nations; my laws will bring them light. **5** I will come quickly and save them... Distant lands wait for me to come; they wait with hope for me to save them. **6** Look up at the heavens; look at the earth! The heavens will disappear like smoke; the earth will wear out like old clothing, and all its people will die like flies. But the deliverance I bring will last forever; my victory will be final.”

Regardless how we look at the past, one thing is certain what the church faced then we face now, and it has always been that way. Since the death and glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ we have found that the Gospel message of salvation has flown in the face of what the world wants and teaches. The Bible is full of Conflict and this can be seen in Paul's letter to the Roman church using metaphorical language referring of the body, where he urges those who have different gifts to work together, perhaps reflecting community tension within the church in Rome. Paul tells us quite clearly that the Gospel has the power to transform people's lives, from slavery to sin to life giving service in and through Christ Jesus.

1 So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer.” But in our service to Christ we have a responsibility to live up to the standards of righteousness which has been so graciously granted in the gospel. God is working within us with the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into living images of his Son, that means that we have to make a conscious effort to ensure this redeeming work continues in our lives. To do that means we have not to give in to the man-made rules and regulations that govern our immoral society. *“2 Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God - what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect. 3 And because of God's gracious gift to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you.”*

Paul likens Christians to members of a human body. There are many members of the human family, but each has a different function, but all are needed for the health of the body or society as a whole. The emphasis for Christians is being placed on the unity of the world-wide church, even though there may be

diversity. *“4 We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. 5 In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. 6 So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us”*. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; **7** if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; **8** if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully. We as men and women of faith all know this yet it is important to reflect upon it today because there are many different denominations of the Christian church world-wide, although we all profess the same Gospel message of love and salvation. But we have to remember who we are by looking at the Gospel and the live redeeming work and word of God and therefore live our daily lives according to it. In the Bible we are constantly being encouraged to meditate on the teachings through prayer and ponder the meaning and let it sink into our consciousness so that we can be transformed inside out, to be better people, sticking to God’s word of life and using his gifts to spread that message of hope by our faithful service.

This means for us as men and women of faith that we cannot look at or talk about service to God without looking at the Gospel which confronts the disciples and all subsequent readers with the question which has divided peoples both within and out with the Church: who precisely is Jesus?

13 Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" **14** "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet." **15** "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" **16** Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." **17** "Good for you, Simon son of John!"

answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. **18** And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. **19** I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven." **20** Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah

Jesus is telling us that His church will be built by Him and Peter will play a part in that, but for us today, we through the readings are encouraged to look to the past. When we do, we realise that throughout the ages since Christ walked the earth all the peoples of God have relied on God to build them up and to lead them and it is still the same today. Matthew affirms that the church which Jesus will build will be able to withstand an assault from Hades. In an age where the church appears to be torn with internal division, perhaps we ought to have more faith in the master builder who has built his church with living stones, even if we might quibble with some of the stones he has chosen! But he has given each one of us gifts to use in our service to him, so we have to rely on God for he is the one who will never let us down and it is through him that we will serve and bring his life giving Gospel message to those who need to hear it.

PRAYER

Lord we pray for a mind and heart of service and we ask you to give us that servant attitude so that we can go out into our dark, hostile, bitter world and bring your light. Help us Lord to speak your words of comfort and to pray for those around us. Help us to intercede on their behalf in and through our prayers but guide our words always with the Holy Spirit so that we can make a difference and be a blessing in your name.

Lord to many of us are scared to look towards the future, never mind looking backwards and yet if we did that, we may realise that we have indeed moved forward in our walk with you. For when we heard your word and received it into our hearts our lives changed, especially since we accepted the truth that you are the Lord and Saviour, the Son of God who died on a cross of shame, who took our sins away from us, who lay dead in the grave for three days only to rise in glory to be with our Heavenly Father in heaven watching over us here on earth. We know Lord that when we accepted Christ into our lives and hearts, we became a new person and you have changed us from the inside out. If we look back we will realise that we are not the same person, now we are renewed and that gives us hope for the future, knowing that you love and care for us and are always there for us, through thick and thin.

Lord even though we are saved, new people in Christ, there are too many out there who do not know your love, help us Lord to save them, helps us to use the spiritual gifts that you have given to us, helps us to use them wisely to bring hope to the hopeless, and love to the loveless. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.