

- REFORMATION -

Small group questions

Romans 5:1-11 (concentrating on vv 6-8) – A church in need of reform

Leaders – if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer – please contact the preacher!

From Mark: *There is no way I'd expect any group to get through all these this week!*

Leaders – choose the questions that will be best for those in your group to discuss.

1. Why have people over centuries and in all cultures, assumed that whatever gods there are, need to be placated by all manner of rituals and religious practices?
2. What assumptions are therefore made about the god or gods?
3. How had this view of God and the resultant rituals and practices, come to be part and parcel of the medieval church?
4. Mark said in his sermon, that this view of God and these rituals, not only cloud and confuse the gospel but in the end, stand in contrast to the gospel – they are anti gospel. Why did he say that? Does everyone in the group understand that this is the case and why?
5. Given a choice, do you like to hear good news or bad news first?

Comment: We will never understand just how good the good news of the Gospel is, until we have grasped just how serious the bad news is!

6. Have you ever felt you had a real enemy? How did that feel?
7. Four words from Romans 5:6-8 described where we were with God – ungodly, powerless, sinners and enemies. Discuss the meaning and significance of these.
8. What prevents people from acknowledging God's verdict on them?
9. *"When I'm at my worst, he gives me his best"*. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us – the ungodly, the enemy. Why?
10. *"Jesus came and did what no other god in the world's religion has done – he came to assume responsibility for our failures. It's as if Jesus stapled the sentence of hell to his body"*. No one ever loved you like this. How do you feel about God's love? How does this help us reflect on all the other experiences of our life?
11. What do you say to someone who says, 'no-one loves me'?
12. What are the excuses people give today, for not accepting and embracing God's love for us in the Lord Jesus?
13. In what ways is the church still in need of reform today? (The world-wide church, the Anglican Church, our church??)
14. *"Do not merely listen to the word....do what it says."* James 1:22. What things might we need to Start; Stop; Continue... as a result of what you have learned through this week's sermon and discussion?

Date: 05 November 2017
Services: 930 Tewanin
Series: Reformation
Passage: Romans 5:1-11 (p 1115)
Title: A church in need of reform

the question of how you get right with God – how you find acceptance with him – how you are guaranteed a future with God is one that has plagued all races, all peoples, all cultures for ever!

What sacrifices are needed to placate the god or the gods?

What rituals do you need to undergo?

Practices do you need to adopt or embrace?

What gifts need to be given?

What rules need to be followed, what chants need to be chanted...

What behaviour needs to be avoided? //

How is the god to be won over?

This the question **religion** asks.

This way of viewing God assumes the following:

1. He or she or they are out to get us
2. Their default position toward us is that they are against us
3. They are mostly demanding
4. They are needy – requiring stuff from us
5. They can be bought with some kind of price
6. And our place with them – ‘salvation’ or nirvana or whatever it is they offer, can be earned or bought.

I’m sure you’ll agree, that’s a terrible view of God

And not one we as Christians recognise... - or only if you don’t have a clue about the Christian faith, would you think that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is anything like that God!

...and yet – and yet – this isn’t far from the view of God that that the church in the middle ages had...

and it was the view which Martin Luther clearly challenged in 1517 when he nailed 95 statements to the church door in Wittenberg, setting out his beefs with the church – predominantly challenging the idea that if one paid the church a certain amount of money, you could thereby reduce the time that a friend or relative spend in ‘purgatory’.

You won’t find purgatory in the Bible, but it was a place where you went when you died where you paid for the sins committed while on earth. Such time was said to be reduced if a friend or relative paid off the church to have you released.

[For those reading online – here are Martin Luther’s 95 statements:

<http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>]

How did this happen?

... if you read the reading notes this week, you’ll have seen that the church was marked by many pagan practices which had been taken over and taken in to the church.

As the church spread around Europe in the middle ages, it would take pagan practices and Christianise them (as if that were possible)... with the result ceremonies, rituals, superstitions, visions, saints, miracles, corruption, magic, the veneration of relics; the understanding that you would buy your way into heaven or pay to be released from the in-between state known as purgatory; the mass or communion - seen to have magical powers – people stealing the bread from communion to take home and make potions for the sick....

... all this was simply part and parcel of the way church was and therefore the way people assumed or thought that God operated in the world.

Can you imagine??

Without a doubt this was a church in need of reform – **massive** need of reform. //

There had been stirrings in earlier in the 1300s in England when Wycliffe worked on his English translation of the Bible... but it was now with Martin Luther's passion and clarity, that reform would begin in earnest.

Luther never set out to leave the Roman Catholic church – only to start a conversation about the nature of indulgences and papal authority... but it wasn't long before he himself was excommunicated...

So his statements he nailed to the church door on Oct 31, 1517 and he himself was excommunicated on January 3, 1521.

Three months later, Luther was called to defend his beliefs before Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms, where he was famously defiant. His famous line: *Here I stand; I can do no other.*

For his refusal to recant his writings, the emperor declared him an outlaw and a heretic.

Luther was protected by powerful German princes, however, and by his death in 1546, the course of Western civilization had been significantly altered.

The church needed to discover again, the simplicity of the good news of Jesus Christ.

It needed to see clearly, that God cannot be bought.

...that the sacraments will not save

...that rituals cannot reconcile

...that the power in the church cannot possibly rest with one man they call the pope or papa

...that superstition plays no part in our relationship with God

... as we'll see next week, that the Mass or communion cannot possibly have the magical powers they assumed it did...

...that what we contribute to the church should never be for what we might get in return...

that priests are **not** mediators between God and humans

that many – so many of the practices of the church were not only

...not to be found in the Bible

not only unhelpful

not only basic pagan superstition

...but that all these things actually in the end **clouded** the gospel – **confused** the gospel...

...actually stood in clear **contrast** with the gospel!!

...they are **opposite** to the gospel – they are anti- gospel!

It's hard to imagine how the church could get it so wrong!

now hear these simply life-giving – life-transforming words...

Christ died for the ungodly...

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You see, all the time back then, church was communicating by all it's dark practices...

...you have to work to win God over...

...you've got to do penance

... you've got to do time in purgatory

...you can't miss mass, or confession, or baptism, or the rosary... or...

an angry God who has to be appeased or placated or softened toward you...

and all the time... God was saying... in perhaps the greatest sentence of the Bible – *“while we were still sinners, Christ died for you”*, the godly for the ungodly.

God was saying – you wonder if I love you?

I'll show you how much I love you – here it is – the love of God planted in time and place in love and sweat 2000 years ago – *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* //

Do you like to hear good news first or bad news, when given a choice?

I always like to hear the bad news... so things finish on a good note.

You've probably heard the story of the doctor who called the patient into his office... and said – I have good news and bad news: which do you want first?

The patient opted for the good news.

The doctor said – the good news is this report from the specialist that came yesterday says that you have 24 hours to live

That was quite a shock... but then the patient realised that this was meant to be the good news

“What on earth is the bad news?” said the patient?

“The bad news”, said the doctor, “is that I was meant to call you yesterday”.

Friends if we want to appreciate **good** news, we have to understand the **bad** news...

So let me share some of that with you...

The question is, what were we like when Christ died for us?

Now like all good medicine, this is hard to hear...

Four words in this passage describe what we were like:

1. **Ungodly** – v8 – God says – I made you in my image – and I can't identify what I'm looking at – what went wrong?
2. **Powerless** – you can't obey – you want to do this but you do this instead... you don't want to do this and you end up doing it... powerless...
3. **Sinners** – while we were still sinners... the word used here is taken from the field of archery – and it describes when the arrow falls short...

God commands us to love him with all our hearts, soul, strength and mind and to love our neighbour as yourself... and every time we fail to do that is a falling short of that standard.

We know this happens... everyone knows this happens... everyone knows the comeback when they've done something of which they're not proud and they say “I'm only human” ...

We know we fall short of our own standards...

Whether you've missed the bus by a minute or an hour or a day – you've missed the bus...

When you break a pane of glass with a small pebble or a huge rock – you've broken the pane...

We've all fallen short – missed the mark of God's standard... that the reality.. and as a result –

4. We're God's **enemies**...

Ever had an enemy?

either something you've done to someone – or something they imagined you did to them... relationship cut off...

That's what we did to God – by our life and the way we live... we turned the very one who gave us life and was keeping us alive – our enemy! Not a great idea!

He takes us so seriously, that when we violate his will – it's personal... every time I mess with a relationship – I impact on him...

Our God – rightfully angry – enmity

We've all shut the door in God's face – not by accident – it was wilful... not for 5 minutes – but for the term of our natural life.

Bit in spite of the hurt... despite the fact that we broke his heart.. God sent his son who deliberately allows himself to be put on a that cross...

As I heard someone put it – what blew me away when I became a Christian is not that I could become Jesus' friend, **but that Jesus would want to be my friend.**

She had understood her relationship with God and the impact of her sin on him, sidelining the creator of the universe... and what amazed here was that Jesus would be prepared to stand with her and die for her.

That's a love that breaks all the rules right?

When does that happen?

When I'm at my **worst**, he gives me his **best!**

V7 – greatest act of love a human can offer – very rarely – someone dies for a good person... - rare but it happens.

Dads throw themselves into the surf to save their kids and sometimes die in the process... most parents would do anything to protect their kids...

soldiers throw themselves on hand grenades to save their mates

But we don't do that for an enemy

Mikhail Gorbachev faced his enemies at one point who had organised an attempted coup... he proclaimed 'there will be no forgiveness' and the coup leaders were shot dead. That's how we expect enemies to be dealt with.

But God steps forward with the body of his son...

We look back at the cross 2000 years ago – and God is saying at the cross – I could not love you any better – any more...

God saying to us – I withheld nothing – I gave everything – even my only son...

When the Bible says that Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, it was something more than a sacrificial act.

Jesus came and did what no other god in the world's religions has done...

He came beside us – to assume responsibility for the failures that our ours...

It's as if Jesus stapled the sentence of hell to his body...

No one ever loved you like this!!

Susan really loves me – she is really loving... but of a different order to this...

You can never say, 'no-one loves me!'

And all your experiences in the world – need to be put alongside this perfect love...

While we were at our **worst** – he gave us his **best**.

God wants to love you and save you and wants you to know you are loved... he goes out of his way to make the point.

It's not the sort of give away you want to throw back in the face of God...

What **excuse** – knowing that he's given his best when we were at our worst – what excuse could you nurse that you make not want to respond to his love?

Chances are there's an excuse you are playing with – it won't stand the ground – not after what God has done for you...

No excuse before God.... You have no excuse but to come... except perhaps if today is the very first time

you've heard of this..!

I'm asking this morning - will you accept Jesus' verdict on your life - that all is not well...

Will you accept his offer to help?

Will you let Jesus love you?

Here's the amazing thing about the Christian faith - the creator of the universe and the judge of all the earth stands before you and says 'I want a relationship with you... but you need to admit you've mucked things up and then allow me to serve you...'

the answer at the reformation as to how you get right with God - was to buy your salvation - by what you did - by your attendance - by what you gave - by the rules and rituals and regulations...

the church was in desperate need of reform...

Praise the Lord for the Reformation and the Reformers... and all the amazing truths that came to light because the Bible was re-discovered and the gospel recovered!!

Praise God that they read from His word... these profound life-giving - life-transforming words...

Christ died for the ungodly...

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Do you want to know if you're welcome, if you're loved, if there's a place for you in God's eternity?

Want to know if you can be forgiven?

Want to know how you can be acceptable in God's sight?

Want to know what hope there is for the worst of sinners?

Want to hear words of life and rescue and restoration and reconciliation?

You won't find them in the rituals of the church... in the demands of the priests... in the requirement to pay your way out of hell or purgatory...

No - **here** is where you'll find them... here in God's word...

For God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

I'm grateful to the Reverend Ray Galea for his sermon on Romans 5:1-11 which inspired much of mine.