

Trinity 5 2017 La Chapelle Archard

Gen 25 19 end ; Rom 8 1-11 ; Mt 13

Esau does not come out well from our reading. He despises his birthright, selling it for what the King James version of the Bible called a mess of pottage.

He sees only his immediate physical needs – ‘I’m starving,’ he says, ‘so what good is my future inheritance if I die of hunger now.’

But it’s not as simple as that. Before the twins are born, they are struggling in their mother’s womb to the point where she wonders if she can survive. Then she is told that her children will become two nations and the older will serve the younger. So, even before he is born, Esau’s fate appears to be sealed.

Then there is Jacob. Not a pleasant piece of work. Which of us, if we were cooking up something nice and were visited by a desperately hungry sibling wanting to share it with us would stop and think to only offer it at the price of their birthright? Already we see here a foretaste of the lying and deceit which he and his mother will engage in to deprive Esau of his dying father’s blessing.

What is clear here is the picture of human sinfulness – the raw material with which God has to work. And for Esau and Jacob we can read each one of us.

So what a relief it is to come to Roman 8. Here we are reminded of God’s love for us, and of His solution to human sinfulness through His Son, Jesus Christ. Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

To resume some of his complex arguments from previous chapters God grace is extended to us through the gift of His Son who died for us. When we believe in Him we are justified by faith and have peace with God Rom 5. Jesus died for us, whilst we were still sinners, because there is no way that we can save ourselves, for we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s standards of love.

But Jesus takes the burden of our sins upon Himself and destroys the power of sin and death and in Him we are reconciled to God.

We have our birthright in Him. When we are baptised we are joined to His death and raised to new life in Him, so we will share in His death and in His resurrection when we die.

But in our daily Christian living we still have to face the problem of our sinfulness and our continuing to fall short of God's standards of love. But the good news is that the power of sin has been broken once and for all by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour.

We are no longer enslaved to sin, thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Christ Jesus.

In our passage from Rom 8 Paul contrasts the law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of Life in Jesus. Jesus has done all that is needed, once and for all through His death on the cross, to deal with sin and its effects on us all.

When we turn to Him, accept Him as our Saviour and welcome Him into our lives we receive His Spirit and we live in the Spirit.

Now the contrast becomes between the flesh and the Spirit. It is important to remember that the flesh does not mean, our physical body – which Hebrew thought regarded as good along with the created order and the physical world – see Genesis 1 and 2 - but the wrong, fallen, use of these God given gifts.

It is when we receive the greatest of God's gifts, that of Jesus Himself, that we are set free from our sinful nature, and receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals Jesus to us as our Saviour and Lord. The Spirit teaches us who we are in Christ, gives us gifts to serve Him and grows fruit in us to make us more like Him. We have the life of God's Spirit within us and this is our birthright as Christians.

This is what we receive in baptism. If we are Christians within the Anglican or Catholic tradition we claim this birthright for our own when we confess our belief in Jesus and make it our own through Confirmation. If we are not then it may be through our confession of faith in Jesus and adult or believers' baptism.

What matters is that we are assured that we are loved, accepted and forgiven in Christ of all our sins, past, present and future. There is no condemnation for us, not because we are good, but because we believe in Christ.

This truth applies to our gospel reading. The gospel seed, by the grace of God has been sown in our hearts and we have received it by faith. It is God's intention that this will grow and produce fruit in and through our lives.

As the parable points out there will always be difficulties in life and these will tend to turn our attention away from our birthright – who we are in Christ - but if we remain rooted in the good ground which is the knowledge of His love our lives will be fruitful as Jesus points out in John 15.

It is not what we are or what we do in ourselves that matters, but who Jesus is and who we are in Him.

We are involved in a spiritual battle, but the battle has already been won for us when Jesus died and rose again. No one can take our birthright away from us.

The German reformer, Martin Luther knew this. He, like many spiritual people, suffered from depression and often felt that the devil was trying to destroy him and convince him that he was sinful and worthless. His answer, which can bless us too in our struggles, was 'I am baptised.' Thanks be to God. Amen