

Second Sunday after Trinity

Collect: Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth: send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you. Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:13-18: But just as we have the same spirit of faith as the Psalmist 'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak,¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Gospel, Matthew 10.24–39: Jesus said, 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master;²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!²⁶ 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father.³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted.³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.³² 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven;³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.³⁴ 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household.³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Reflection:

Jesus' use of the analogy of slavery might appear to assume an acceptance of its continued place in society and he also talks about situations of family dispute.

I am quite sure that Jesus' analogy does not anticipate the terrors of the Atlantic slave trade which was so dehumanising but the reference to the arrangements for domestic slavery reminds us that at the time of Jesus, life was damaged and limited for those in slavery in the Roman Empire and many were very cruelly treated.

In the Gospel passage Jesus wants people to be clear that there is no difference in our human condition in relation to the things that contain and constrain us, but we must also recognise that socially and culturally the situation facing many people then and still today is a desperate one. That we can find liberation in being more like Jesus, taking up the cross and identifying with his suffering should not blind us to social injustice and the effects of prejudice and racist views and activity.

We can also notice in the Gospels that early on there are times when Jesus conceives his ministry as being limited just to the Jewish people. This was most challenged by the Syrophenician woman when she suggested that she and others who were not Jewish were being thought of by him as wild dogs scrambling for scraps of food under a table. She did not mince her words and we notice that Jesus changed his mind about listening to her case and addressing her need.

With contemporary insights many today would ask Jesus and St Paul to be more explicit in their criticism of a way of living that in their time was controlling, divisive and limited the opportunities of all those who were slaves. But we also have their bigger picture that includes the radically different way Jesus taught about greater equality in relationships. And how specifically he challenged the whole system of land ownership that was rooted in building up personal wealth both for the land owner and for the heir who would inherit it and instead Jesus' advocating on behalf of all those who were left behind, including those who were slaves.

We also notice in the Gospels that there is the expectation that the Son of Man, Jesus, would return in the lifetime of the first disciples and this led to an acceptance of living with things as they were because they were to be endured only for a short time. The later Old Testament prophecies of Daniel being interpreted by the Gospel writers in this way. Two millennium later we know differently: we can interpret these prophecies also in the light of contemporary knowledge which should lead us to act more urgently when faced with injustice and exploitation. Christian communities, other faith communities coming alongside all those who place justice, the integrity of creation and peace at the centre and so offering a way of discipleship that does not allow prejudice or discrimination to motive our thinking but instead discipleship that challenges the actions and activities of those who ascribe to these ways.

The Venetian artist Tintoretto lived at a time when that city was plague ridden and his painting of St Mark freeing the slave seems remarkably prophetic 500 years later. The context of it are the effects of a plague in a multi-cultural multi-faith city and the way that living there sharpened hearts minds, including Tintoretto's, about injustice in relation to those who were most likely to die. Highlighting where there are open wounds that leave people humiliated, being trodden on even by those of recognised authority. A painting about hope of liberation still relevant for our time!