

## **Talk for Sunday 10.00am 2<sup>nd</sup> August Holy Communion Service**

**Revd Gerry Foster**

### **Children of the Promise – God’s Sovereign Choice**

The Apostle Paul starts this chapter in Romans emphasising he is speaking the truth. He backs this up, not only with his conscience, but the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s anguish, his unceasing sorrow, was Israel’s failure to accept that through the sacrificial love of Jesus, everyone could be saved. Everyone could have a relationship with God on equal terms. Jesus had been crucified and died for all. It was God’s sovereign choice that all people had the potential to be children to receive his promises. It wasn’t Israel’s prerogative through right, but their privilege through his mercy.

Jews were disturbed that Christians were occupying positions of privilege that hitherto had been theirs. It grieved Paul that, although some considered him a renegade, he considered himself a faithful Jew. He lists the blessings that have been associated with the Jewish race and their relationship with God which included the covenants with Adam, Noah, Moses, Joshua and David, the receiving of the Law, worship in the temple, the history passed down from the patriarchs including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and indeed the promises that invested them with God’s own glory. Yet, Paul also states that from these patriarchs is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is God over all forever.

Paul then develops his argument in the context of his time and the concerns of the Jews, with the new Christians. God’s promises are not just for those who were previously under the law of Israel. After all, not all the nation of Israel had responded to God’s leading. Physical descent from Abraham was not enough. God promises and he fulfils his sovereign purposes...he is not unjust. Paul argues, that it’s not for the people to claim rights, but for God to be merciful and compassionate. Indeed, even Pharaoh’s place in history was that God might display his power and fulfil his purpose, so that his name would be proclaimed. One commentary by Leon Morris states about this passage that Paul means his readers to see that “What will emerge from the current situation will not be the triumph of the selfwill of his Jewish opponents, but rather, the glory of God.”

Lift that sentence to today's context...what will emerge from our current situation? Rather than the triumph of the selfcentredness and limited understanding of humankind, with regard to both each other and their place in the whole creation, it will be the glory of the Sovereign, merciful God, fulfilling his purposes.

The pandemic has been a worldwide leveller. While some may be more at risk than others, due to underlying health problems or cultural background or geographic location, nevertheless, we are all at some risk. We're all on the same page of concern today. What is emerging is a world where we hope and pray the 'new normal' will bring some true positives from being stopped in our tracks; new perspectives and priorities; a recalibration of care and compassion and equality. Just as Paul was trying to plead with the Jews in his times, we need to look at ourselves and face our assumed expectations of privilege and be challenged by a new order of things. Everybody needs support, encouragement, opportunity and fulfilment of potential for their own and indeed if they choose to believe it, God's purposes for them with this gift of life. It's up to us to share this wonderful faith in the almighty God and Saviour we have with others, so they can experience it too. This faith is not about us, but God in us, and working through us, as part of his creation for his eternal plan.

Our Gospel reading reminded us that Jesus had compassion on a large crowd and healed the sick. There was no hierarchy of age, gender, race or problem. Jesus fed the people with the blessed loaves and fish. It specially states there were five thousand men, but also women and children. All were fed and all were satisfied, in what was a patriarchal society.

We are emerging carefully and prayerfully into an unknown and uncertain new order. However, let's take hope from the truth that Paul was expressing, concerning the sovereignty and the power and the compassion of God. Let's not assume we deserve...we are called to serve. We're not people of our own privilege, but to share with others God's promise, of compassion and forgiveness, love and life.

We are going to need to book our place in church when we regather for worship. We won't always be able to come when we choose, or to sit in the chair we usually sit in. There will be a different way of us meeting, to give everyone the chance to come. Yesterday I heard how in a church which has opened, a regular churchgoer gave up their seat when someone not knowing

the procedure, just turned up to worship. We'll keep some seats reserved for those who arrive unexpectedly and the strangers, but we will need a grace and generosity with everyone and with all that we do.

In Watton or wherever we find ourselves, we're here for such a time as this, to reach out to each other in prayer and care, as guidelines permit. First and foremost, we must be prayerfully listening out to follow God's lead.

This is not in our own strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. This also today, with the same purpose as yesterday and forever, for God's name to be proclaimed in all the earth. Even now, we are children of Promise: not because of who we are and what we do, but through God's Sovereign choice, because of who he is. And as Paul wrote in his letter "Amen".