

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity 2020.

Ezekiel 2:1-7. Colossians 3:12-17. Psalm 37:1-6.
John 4:31-38.

The Collect: Lead us, Lord, with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Colossians 3:15 ‘And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body, and be thankful.’

It’s a very unpleasant feeling being depressed or anxious. My mum used to say she would rather have had her leg cut off! Sometimes we are tempted to commiserate with another by saying, ‘I know how you feel.’ Don’t! Just stand with them in silent sympathy (or empathy), and bring them to God in your prayers (later). Yet, there are a few people who seem to breeze through life without ever experiencing such anguish, deep persistent sadness, that they just don’t know what is the matter with you. A sermon is not the time and place to attempt a comprehensive treatise on the nature of anxiety, so why start by citing a verse from our New Testament portion for today? Is it because the Bible provides instant relief in the form of talismanic or shamanic incantations? No, because, wherever Jesus is asked to heal, a relationship has to be present between the ‘patient’ and the ‘doctor’. A person who is anxious and depressed is generally so concerned about their situation that they can’t listen to the ‘doctor’. They are, in reality, ruling themselves.

The Greek word for rule in this sentence from Colossians is ‘*brabeueto*’. It can be translated as ‘umpire’, as it stems from the umpire of the games, the *brabeueo*. Hence, one rendering of the sentence is: ‘Let the peace of Christ continually decide as umpire or arbitrate in your hearts’. [<http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=35453>] So, if you are your own ‘umpire’, you award yourself the prize, or you reward your own thinking about something; perhaps justifying your feelings, however shallow, unfounded, or wrong they are. That is a singular, individual activity. It is not dependent on others, such as the Church, it is not informed or regulated, or umpired by the Peace of God, nor of the truth He speaks through Scripture. Thus, the lonely depressed heart strives with itself on a desert island, cut off from the body

of believers. All four of our readings for today have a common strand, namely that of dependence on others who both reap and sow. The ‘others’ are not all free from anxiety, nor are they intrinsically better than oneself. In fact, they can be evil-doers, rebellious, impudent, and stubborn.

St Paul points out that God’s chosen ones, (must) put on compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearance, (ability to) forgive, and love (agape, free-giving). These are all virtues that provide the ‘sanitizing gel’ of godly relationships. However, when you are on the desert island of depression, or anxious to find a way off it, ‘Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.’ However alone, or culpable, or self-condemnatory, or helpless, or sad one feels at a time of depression, there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. You cannot be a lone Christian. You cannot be a Christian on your own. Are you getting the point here?

What’s the point of meekness if there is no context in which to practice it? What’s the point of humility if nobody notices (!)? What’s the use of harmony when you are singing to yourself all the time?

Here then is a reliable antidote to the poison of self-isolating sadness: say ‘Thank you’. Be thankful. Being thankful is like being a building with open doors all round supporting the roof; rather than being hemmed in by windowless walls. Your eyes can look outwards to the light of Christ in the world. You can be assured that, even if you do not feel the strength to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (v16), the Church includes you in its worship. It will say ‘Thank you’ for you.

Let the peace of Christ continually umpire the game for you. You don’t need to cling onto the parachute chords; just let them take the strain. Practice the act of letting go, and all will be well.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgThh7sDgNM>

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.