

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity 2020.

Exodus 34:4-9. Romans 12:9-21. Psalm 101:1-6.
Luke 6:36-42.

The Collect: Grant us Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful: that we, who cannot do anything that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Romans 12:12. 'Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.'

Sometimes men disappear into their cave, or women feel parched and seek out a well. I'm paraphrasing from a book that was a best seller from 1992. It's called 'Men are from Mars, women are from Venus'. You might have already read it, but if you haven't I would commend it to you as an handbook for translating from what men say to what women hear, and vice versa. Yes, in general, there is a difference between the two sexes! No doubt some of you will know how frustrating it can be to negotiate the uneven pathway of relationships between people, not just marriage partners. At times there is palpable love, and at others there is sheer incomprehension. But, with the help of mutual patience and a bit of information on psychodynamics, people can learn how to help each other to flourish, mostly. Not many of us are perfect...

Now, read that verse (Romans 12:12) again. There is an added element occupying a space between an hopeless person and the situation causing loss of hope. That element means you are not struggling alone. Likewise, 'be patient in tribulation', implies that you have to bear a difficult situation on your own, and just put up with it in the hope that it will be resolved. Of course, you will be realising by now that a Christian is never on their own. 'Hope' is about the relationship between us and God. That relationship for Moses became tangible through the tablets of the Law. For us it becomes tangible through the incarnation of God in Christ, and we taste the Grace of God in the Holy Sacrament.

Just as men need time to retreat to their cave occasionally before they can come out feeling ready for life, and just as women need to talk it over with someone when they are feeling empty, we Christians need to recognise that we are human, and inhabit a world of challenges until we

go to be with God in a place where His rule is unchallenged by human fallibility. In order to 'rejoice in (our) hope, be patient in tribulation, and be constant in prayer,' we have to surrender control of life to God. If we don't we will continue to 'judge', 'condemn', fail to forgive (resent), and lead someone who is equally blind into a pit (c.f. Luke 6). So, we need the interpreter and the word (the Spirit and the Logos) to stand next to us in our relationships with all others. Sing along to this well-known hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqOnjmr9Ah0>

Now, those words can be translated differently, but even more powerfully: 'In hope, rejoicing, in affliction, showing endurance, in prayer, steadfastly continuing.' That takes 'hope' out of our hands in the sense that 'hope' is not our own property or of our own making, it is a gift of God. God made us to hope, to hope in a better relationship with Him and through Him with those around us. Our job is to rejoice, not mope! He understands what is going on to cause us to feel down, or to want to escape to the cave. We are commanded to rejoice whilst the circumstances (and emotions) are not optimal. How can we do that?! First, by surrendering our ownership of the situation to God. If anyone can solve the problem, then He can. I must trust Him; more, I must rejoice that He is more than capable of doing something I cannot achieve myself. Secondly, 'in affliction, showing endurance' indicates that I don't give up rejoicing despite the affliction. I keep on rejoicing, I keep on showing that I am not being daunted or overcome (i.e. be quietly confident it will come to an end). Thirdly, 'in prayer, steadfastly continuing' I report back to God what I'm thinking, and keep Him in the loop!

Well, it's been an heavy sermon today, hasn't it? What it amounts to is this: we are never Christians on our own. Though we can misunderstand people and situations (like men and women misinterpret words and actions of the opposite sex), God has not left us to sort everything out ourselves. He wants us to adopt a different attitude to the complexity of human ups and downs, namely to nurture the God given ability to stay in the Godly zone. That's a zone in which there is confidence, where rejoicing is the engine to take us through to the other side. Keep praying, letting the 'control tower' know what's going on in the cockpit.

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