



Pentecost 3 June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Romans 5.1-11 Matthew 9.35-10.

Greetings! It's great to be here as part of our church family as we celebrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. May I welcome all who are watching you via 'live screen' and we long for the time we can all worship & fellowship together! We welcome home Rev Mel, back safely from "the Northern Ireland experience".

**Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Jesus had many disciples and from them he chose 12 as leaders. He called them apostles, and the names of the 12 are given in today's Gospel. I've often pondered and been amazed of how the authentic witness and fruits of Jesus's selection of these men, empowered by the Holy Spirit, accomplished the mission given them to **"spread the good news around the world."**

I found this 'gem' on the net. Can you imagine the following scenario 2,000 odd years later, based on today's practices, of forming a working group? Today, companies and yes, Church authorities screen people for any position of leadership. Let us imagine that the 12 apostles were sent by Jesus to a firm of consultants for similar psychological tests for suitability of Jesus's mission.

Jesus received the following report, and I quote:

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. It is our opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew & Bartholomew have absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew had been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale. One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated,

ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. Don't you love this. But history goes to show us who is in control. God!

I am reminded of the memory verse for UNIT 3 S.R.E. which says. in Matthew 19.26 '**There are some things people cannot do, but God can do anything**'. So onto a theme from our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from Romans and Paul's characteristic phrase, '**we are justified by faith**', which is through no merit or action on our part. But have we ever reflected on, what does that feel like, and What does it mean, to be justified by faith?

According to Paul, it feels like the end of a war. We are now at peace with God. It is easy to think of peace as an inner state of calmness, but that can't be what Paul is talking about, if we read the next few verses, and we know anything about his life. Peace, for Paul, is not a feeling, but an actual change in the world. Paul has known what it is to be like to be at war with God, fighting against what he knew, at some level, was God's work in Jesus. Paul has known what it was to be in an uneasy and mistrustful truce with God, when he tried to do God's will, but failed, over and over again. Peace with God is knowing that you are on the same side as God, for ever. God sent his Son, Jesus, to grant to all, a citizenship in His glorious Kingdom! So, whatever we do, or fail to do from now on, we have rights, like a passport, that signals that **we are at peace** with God's kingdom. According to Paul the characteristics, of a justified Christian, is not a serene smile, but hope! **Yes hope!** We could liken it to having a non-changing, indestructible passport, that is stamped 'nationality: Christian', and that means, more or less, the equivalent of saying 'nationality: **alive**'. '**Life in abundance**' as St John writes in John 10:19b!

Everything that happens to us from now on proves where we belong. Everything is characteristically 'Christian'. Similarly, it is characteristically 'Christian' to suffer. Note, this is not something we worry about, but something we see as a 'national' characteristic. Hope is the beginning, and not the end of our journey! We start out on it, our passport as justified citizens of God's kingdom, clutched in our hands, because of what God has done for us and promised to us in Jesus.

We set out in hope, and the more we travel, the more we understand the nature of hope, God's great act of hope in Christ. But if we accept this passport, this citizenship into life, we must also accept the Spirit that goes with it. We cannot be citizens of God's kingdom, without the Spirit of the Kingdom, which is the Spirit of hope.

God's hope is based on His unswerving love for us, which we can do nothing to alienate, which we do nothing to deserve. But once we accept that passport into freedom and life, we must accept that this Spirit of hope will increasingly form our being. This Spirit will begin to shape all our decisions, the way we respond to other people, the way we see life. We will not be able to do or be anything that does not proclaim our citizenship.

And so we continue the mission of Jesus. We are all called to repeat what Jesus did, to bring peace and healing to all who are sick, and all who are troubled.

For '**the Kingdom of God is at hand**'. However, in our fragility, we must recognise that we all are capable of being both Peter the Rock & Judas the betrayer. We are no better than the next person. What we are given and learn from our Christian lives and experience is a gift. It is not a gift, however, to be jealously guarded within the exclusive club of the Christian Church. It has been given to us without charge! We must give without charge. **Amen!**