

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 11 Sunday 18th March_2018.

Human condition: struggle and joy. READ Romans 8: 18 - 30.

Background text: Hebrews 12: verse 2 “For the joy set before him Jesus endured the Cross”.

Our AIM for the beginning of this year will be for each of us individually and all of us together to explore what it means to be truly human. The Biblical argument is that true humans are those made in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1: 26, 27*) – not a physical likeness because God is Spirit.

(PP2) “DEATH and Struggle” – including both physical and spiritual mortality has become a part of our human condition (*Genesis 2: 16, 17*). No one is naturally immortal – immortality is a gift of God (*Romans 6: 23. Read Genesis 3: 22*). The fact of our mortality and struggle is something which should challenge our human pride and limits us in a way which makes us creaturely rather than thinking we are gods. (“Memento mori”). But our struggle also positively makes us what we are and can be a means of growth and opportunity. (Or the converse)

We have been asking (Previous sessions): what does this consequence of the Fall - “death” mean? Humanity – men and women did not drop dead immediately – they “began” to die, in their soul and spirit and also **became physically mortal**. The Bible is not a scientific text book, but it does deal with TRUTH. The book of Genesis lays out and we read of the consequences of human choice and sin as detrimentally **changed relationships**. One consequence pictured in Genesis and spoken of last week is of the presence of Evil in the world and that humans struggle with an Enemy. (*Genesis 3: 15*). An enemy is someone or something which is hostile and feels hatred towards me, opposes me and even intends injury to me.

- Enmity between the Serpent (symbol of all that is opposed to God) and humanity through the generations. (I have an enemy Evil One or Evil itself is my enemy?)

Also, the clear teaching of both OT and NT is that the Messiah – the Anointed One has come and put to rights, make possible not just the gift of Resurrection Immortality but also a reconciliation and peacemaking in all damaged relationships. **It is the work of Jesus to destroy the works of the Evil One. Because we follow Jesus then we too are subject to the assaults of his Enemy (*1 John 3: 8. The Son of God appeared for this very reason, to destroy what the Devil had done. John 12: 31 NOW is the time...the ruler (prince) of this world will be overthrown*).** I am the first to say that Christians all too often blame the Evil One for our poor choices and lack of love for righteous living BUT the fact that “we have an Enemy” is a fact to bare in mind. As we approach Easter we should be reminded that there were no Easter Bunnies and Chocolate Eggs for Jesus only struggle with earthly evil principalities and powers and also the *Spiritual Wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6: 12)*. Jesus came to confront and overthrow his Enemy and the Enemy of humanity and all who are on the side of Light and Right.

Struggle and Labour in Christian faith is seen as a reality – but not necessarily as a negative or an evil in itself but even as a means of growth and a pathway to fruition. *(All things work together for good for those who love God and are the called according to his purposes. Romans 8: 28. Paul's arguments on the groaning, struggling creation awaiting the return of Jesus and the creation of the New Heaven and Earth. This is the clear teaching of Scripture through thousands of years and in the lives of countless people – struggle and even pain can be a means of growth and fruition or harvest. **This is supremely illustrated in the struggle of Jesus against evil in many forms and also against personal temptation.** We see his successful struggle to remain obedient to the Father God. For the great joy and harvest set before him he “endured the Cross” (*Hebrews*).*

Even in **Genesis 3: 15** there is an indicator of hope in the promise of action and redemption. One will come from woman who though attacked by Evil will turn and crush Evil's power. Even though the snake will fatally bite his heel.

Hebrews 12: 1 – 11 we are reminded of the struggle that we face and urged to keep on. The finishing tape is death and we will need to resist evil and sin until that day when we pass through death into the presence of God. Struggle had a purpose and a goal for Jesus and it can for us too even though like Jesus we may be unsure of what this purpose is when we are in the midst of the struggle.

Jesus looked for the JOY ahead of obedience to the Father and their plan: the release of humans to freedom and the restoration of the Fallen.

(PP3) How do we struggle and resist the dark things within and the Evil outside of us? We must recognize that God has not left us on our own and also God has given us the resources that we need to do what he asks. (*Ephesians 6*)

We have one another in this struggle: testudo shields of faith in Jesus (tortoise). **We are clothed by Jesus who has anointed the armour by winning the battle:** salvation is our helmet, truth holds us together as a belt, the true Word of God is our sword to cut through lies and false motives, righteousness protects our heart choices, our feet are shod with readiness to share the gospel of peace.

We have the Holy Spirit, and this is a spiritual rather than a physical struggle (although it can take its toll physically as we are physical- spiritual human beings. “The battle is the LORD's” as H. reminded me! We are only to fight Evil with PRAYER AS THE SPIRIT LEADS. We are to **be alert** (as we remember the disciples falling asleep with Jesus' request to watch and pray with him we know our weakness). **Be ready.**

How do we pray? *We have life in Christ Jesus who sets us free from the law of sin and death – this is the work of the Spirit. Romans 8: 1,2. We work and pray to be controlled not by human nature but by the Spirit. The Spirit of God who raised Christ from death lives in us! Hallelujah.*

V15 By the Spirit we cry out Abba – Father! My Father! To pray is to be children of God. God's Spirit cries with our spirits – this is the witness, the testimony, the conviction – I am a child of God. I am born again. The whole of creation is groaning – for that future hope. This is the struggle that we share – as if we were in labour and waiting for the delivery of the New Creation. It is not just creation but according to Paul (v23) *We*

who have the Spirit groan as we wait for God to make us his children and set our whole being free.

Do not be deceived the Spirit is struggling within us until Jesus is fully formed in us and until we have our resurrection bodies. We have many joys now, but we also encounter resistance and evil.

We do not know how to pray. *In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. Verse 26 **How do we interpret what this means?** (Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. KJV)*

This is a very helpful admission of weakness – intellectual and spiritual weakness and often accompanied by a great weariness.

We have come to the end of ourselves. We need to keep silence and listen.

For myself I think this is not just about praying in tongues but may follow personal prayer in tongues.

Paul speaks about the Spirit pleading – within us specifically within our hearts – groans not words – may or may not be uttered out loud. – God the Father looks into our hearts and knows what the thought, the longing of the Spirit is. (Because the Spirit is pleading with the Father and is pleading on behalf of his people but in accordance with what the Spirit wants).

We know (v28) that God wants what is the best for us. This is always the purpose of God and so the groan of the Spirit is for this that we be conform to the image of God. (For we are made in the image of God's likeness but that image, that relationship is marred. The groan is for us to be fully reborn/ remade in God's likeness).

God will use all circumstances therefore as we co-operate to work for this good, this calling, this purpose. So that we may live for God's greater glory. Our role model for this is always – Jesus of Nazareth. His struggle, his obedience for the joy set before him is to be our means of understanding our struggle – why is this happening to me *oh Father, if it is possible take this cup from me. Yet not my will but yours...*

So as in prayer we discover we do not know how to pray.... for ourselves, for others, for the world, ...we discover that God does know.