

## Trinity 2 Cathedral 2023

**Romans 5: 1-8; Matthew 9: 35 - 10: 23.**

“While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” *Romans 5:6*

Weakness is something we are acutely aware of, as helplessly we see individuals families, nations fall into all manner of crisis, at the same time we may have family members or a friend who is ill for all sorts of reasons and under different conditions. Any sample week brings its catalogue of traumatic situations, such as the capsizing of the migrant vessel in the Mediterranean Sea last week with the loss of over 500 lives, and the awful attack in Nottingham, and other tragedies in the last few days. These things keep us aware of what we have and how we, ourselves, are living, breathing and having our very being. It is not without good reason that people protest, and march, and hold vigils, and recalibrate matters of importance, in the light of a current tragedy or callous acts of inhuman disregard for another’s situation. These things demonstrate that the contrast between weakness and strength in coping with human attitudes and power-struggles is a recurrent and serious problem for the world of this and every age.

Paul, in writing to the Romans, underlined the fact that Christ died for those unable to lift themselves from where they had fallen. The popular Biblical commentator of another era, William Barclay, in a comment on this verse relates a story from T.E. Lawrence in the desert in 1915 with a party of combatants on camels. The heat was so fierce that the wind was like fire, and they were hooded and unsighted for protection, when one of their number fell, unseen, from his camel. This character was not well-known to the others, but he was suspected by them of having killed a man and then fled to the desert and joined their company. In the heat and with the lack of water and food, the reaction of the men who were with Lawrence, when they realised what had happened, was that he did not matter; some thought he had been shot, others that he was out of his mind and maybe lost in a mirage, all considered him “not worth

half-a-crown.” But Lawrence, when he discovered that they were without one of their companions, turned his camel around and rode back for an hour and a half until he found the man, gave him some of the last of his water and put him on his camel, and brought him back to the rest of the company. Lawrence saw *the person and his weakened condition*, without prejudice or judgement on the accusations or suspicions of the others. It is a challenging thought that we can only too easily transfer to our own less dramatic, but still responsible, situations in daily life, without needing to see ourselves in a role of some kind of saviour or deliverer. Simply putting out the hand, or giving a message of compassion through word or deed, to support the weak and helpless, is not beyond most of us.

From the Gospel for today, we read of the disciples being sent to do not just the equivalent of offering a glass of water to the thirsty, but, in fact, to do great things - and with nothing: no resources that mostly we would consider essential, and at the same time they were few in number. Actually it is easy to miss that point and just focus on the lack of resources, but being a couple on our own, or an individual, or a tiny group can be just as debilitating, if we allow it to affect us, as not having what we might consider to be essential practical help. These disciples were, from this low resource-base, to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons. First and foremost they needed to trust and have faith. It is a simple enough equation, and one which a primary school child could understand, but requires a concerted effort to put it into practice, and therein lies the seed of the challenge. They required the confidence and assurance that left them with the belief that through a strength that they did not themselves possess, that, even in the weakness of their own abilities, great things would happen.

T.E. Lawrence was a strange character, as we know, and was not unaware of his own needs and desires, but the story that is told of him by William Barclay does have something of the ring of truth about it, and it has echoes of the Parable of the Good Samaritan about it, as he was sharing the last drops of water, and, indeed, the encounter may be mirrored in all kinds of situations in society

today. What makes it especially sensible and sensitive for us is that it is occurring in a desert situation, and relating to the gift of life-giving water. We can feel the consequences of doing nothing and the self-justification of the fellow travellers who wanted to look the other way, but let us recognise that it is in our weakness that Christ died for us, and part of that weakness lies in our capacity to take the easy path.

Now we don't always do it. Few of us are without a conscience, and most of us rise to a challenge, but it is easier to do that when we have just succeeded in some way or for whatever reason been given confidence and encouragement. But, and this is one of the disciples' great and painful discoveries, that our failures are at the point of our greatest need, perhaps at on specific moment, or maybe long-term.

So, when we are looking to Christ, and the moment of his unique and sacrificial offer of life, *let us remember that where we are most likely to find him in our lives, is just at the critical time when we are at our weakest.* Overfamiliarity, lack of concentration, carelessness, even blindness to another's situation, are most apparent when we are sailing along on the crest of a wave; but, when we are weakened for whatever reason, we can connect most assuredly with the forsaken one, crucified and abused. That is no moment to close our eyes and struggle in our own strength, in fact, often we cannot, but it is a time that Christ can use as he carries us through the dark times, to acknowledge that somehow he will use it to help us grow spiritually and perhaps will teach us something new too.

As Paul wrote to the Romans: "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

