

**The spirit helps us in our weakness
A sermon on Romans 8:26**

Sunday 20 July 2008

**Church of the Ascension, Hilton
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Readings:

Exodus 3:1-12

Psalm 103

Romans 8:18-27

Matthew 13: 24-30 and 36-43

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“Hello, how are you today?”

“No, I’m fine thanks, and you?”

“Fine thanks. And how are... Oh I already asked you that!” ☹

A typical greeting... and we always say, “Fine thanks” – unless its absolutely obvious we’re not, like when we’ve got terrible flu or a broken leg we didn’t have the last time the person asked after our health. Or unless we are one of those people who, when asked, actually tells you in detail exactly how they are ☺).

My focus today is one part of the NT passage:

**Romans 8: 26: The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us...**

I wonder how we relate to that? Generally we don’t “do weakness”; it is frowned upon. My example of a typical greeting may seem a little silly – after all, when asked how we are just in passing, instead of truly intently, we’re not likely to pour out a whole series of notes on our physical, spiritual and mental health. But in general we are a society who prefers not to acknowledge weakness. I shall return to that, but will make a few general comments on our Scripture readings for today...

**OT – Exodus 3:1-12**

A unique encounter between God and Moses

Have many others had such?

Have any? – Yes, a few have had similar, including the prophet Isaiah. Also Saul, persecutor of the Christian church, who was confronted by the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and who was so transformed that later, his name changed to Paul, he became one of the early church’s greatest leaders; it is from his Letter to the Romans that we have been reading, and from which I have preached on some recent Sundays.

So the powerful and all-holy God, creator of all that exists, is revealed to Moses in a life-changing encounter

### **Psalm 103**

God's characteristics extolled, including being forgiving and healing, slow to anger, rich in mercy

### **Gospel – Matthew 13**

Jesus, this same God who took on human flesh and came to live amongst humanity, told a story pointing to God's abundant generosity and graciousness towards us, in the passage read from the Gospel of Matthew today. The parable of the wheat and the weeds, it is called – and it makes clear that even though there are weeds amongst the wheat, God cautions against just uprooting the weeds in case it causes the wheat to be damaged – but which also points to the nature of God which is to pour out blessing on all, even those who misuse the blessings or refuse to respond. God's provision is continually made available, freely given

Although that is all I'm saying today on those passages, they are reminders to us of the nature of God

### **Romans**

Focus over the last few weeks

Internal struggles with sin, with our selfish egos [Sermon, 13 July]

The battles we have within us to be faithful to God

Paul detailing some of his own struggles – very honest

Following from that...

The Spirit of God, who lives IN us, assists us in our areas of weakness

God is WITH us even in our struggles

A name for Jesus – Emmanuel – means "God with us" in Hebrew, or more fully capturing the nuance of it, "God in our midst"

The Spirit intercedes for us

Prays for us

Just before that, in rather long sentences and complex wording, Paul reminds us that all creation is groaning, waiting in hope for the fullness of God's glory to be revealed, and for all creation to be set free from its sufferings and all the effects of its brokenness and sinfulness; he reminds us of the hope we have in God

**8:26 & 27 ... Read again**

Weakness?

Reading a book about Henri Nouwen, called “Wounded Prophet”

Henri was a Catholic priest, writer, theologian – at his peak from the 1970’s – early 1990’s when he died from a heart attack

Writer of many books – perhaps over 100

Taught theology at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard

Huge appeal to Catholics, Protestant Evangelicals, people disenchanted with the church, the lot!

Yet a “wounded person” – and one of the titles of his books is “The Wounded Healer”

He faced many struggles within his personality. At one time in mid-adulthood, he had a breakdown, as he faced some of his deepest problems and pains. When he came through that, he wrote some of his more powerful books

Gave up his Univ teaching career to join the L’Arche communities (first in France, then in Toronto, Canada) – name means “The Ark” in French. It is for the profoundly disabled – physically and mentally handicapped.

Some amazed that he gave up so much prominence for this ministry  
Some angry (one woman’s angry response)

But he wrote:

“The disabled cannot hide their disability”

We (who think we are strong) hide our weaknesses

But a physical disability cannot be hidden. It needs to be accepted, dealt with, lived with – the person needs to be loved, to know they are the Beloved of God

And so too, other “weaknesses”

Society generally uncomfortable with that

We try to be strong, and feel obliged to project that to others

Even a form of “Muscular Christianity” – always “blessed by the Lord” – yet it seems profoundly dishonest at times

There is only one person NOT broken in some way: Jesus

And still, even Jesus knew hunger, physical pain, mental anguish, and took on the sinfulness of humanity on the cross, at deep spiritual cost; he knew sadness, tears; he experienced anger at hypocrisy of those who pretended to be holy but were anything but...

How does the Spirit assist us in our weakness?

Spirit of God dwells IN us

God close to us

Paul writes that the spiritual life is characterised by the indwelling Spirit; the Spirit of the same God who appeared to Moses and Saul / Paul, and who is “slow to anger, abounding in mercy”, the Spirit of the same God – is in ME!

Romans 8:1 = “No condemnation...”

Enable us to live life with God even whilst still dealing with all the imperfections of life brought about through sin, through our egos selfishly preferring to do things our way rather than God’s way

Persistent sins

Addictions – variety [including afflictions of affluence, acquisition of material things, gluttony – not just tradition ‘alcohol and drugs’!]

Difficult relationships and the struggles of life

Deformities of spirit / damaged personalities – childhood hurts / traumas / pain caused by wrong choices previously made / difficult life circumstances beyond our control

Open to God

Talk to God

I spoke recently with one young man, who recently took to daily walks on own, for additional exercise on top of his sport but to consciously be with God and in conversation with God

Invite the Spirit – regularly, daily

[My ‘occasional habit’ of wearing red socks, as previously mentioned in a sermon, the colour red being symbolic of God’s Spirit, and as my reminder that God’s Spirit is with me]

Develop that relationship consciously

Participate in that which brings us Grace from God – Scriptures, Sacraments including confession, coming to communion

**Close in prayer**