

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
31st August 2021

READINGS

*The stalwart walks in step with GOD;
their path blazed by GOD, they are happy.
If they stumble, they are not down for long;
GOD has a grip on they hand.*

Psalms 37:23-24 (The Message Translation)

So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:

They kill us in cold blood because they hate you.

We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one.

None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

Romans 8:31-39 (The Message Translation)

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:4-10 (Good News Translation)

REFLECTION

Over 100 years ago a group of Scottish fishermen were relaxing in the local pub. No doubt they were telling fishermen's tales about the one that got away. In his enthusiasm, one of the fishermen gestured a little too excitedly and he connected with one of the waitresses walking past. He knocked the tray of drinks out of her hand, sending it flying onto the whitewashed wall, where the contents left a large brown stain.

"I'll have to get that whole wall redone!", moaned the landlord.

"Perhaps not.", said a stranger at the bar, "May I have a look?"

Having nothing to lose, the landlord agreed. The stranger went over and studied the stain for a while. Then he took from his bag some brushes, some jars of linseed oil and some pigment. He began sketching around the stain, adding dabs of colour here and there. And in time an image began to emerge. A stag, with a great rack of antlers.

The artist signed the painting, paid for his meal and left with a nod. When the locals went over to look at the painting, they saw that the name of the artist was, Edwin Landseer. One of the greatest wildlife painters of his generation.

Under Landseer's hands, the mistake became a masterpiece.

God does the same with us. He takes all the events of our lives; he takes all that has happened to us, and, by his grace, God makes a masterpiece out of us. Or, as Paul puts it, when he writes to the Ephesians: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Think about that for a moment!

Even the things we get wrong, even our foul ups, God uses to turn into moments of glory!

Sometimes we are so afraid! We are afraid that we will get things wrong - we will say the wrong thing, or we will do the wrong thing. And because of that fear, we end up doing nothing at all. Churches are full of members who are unsure, unwilling to take the risk. "Oh, I couldn't do that!" rings out among the pews.

In Church we find it too easy to stick with what we know. We will not risk anything new. We will not risk reaching out for fear that we will offend. We will not offer ourselves in service to our community for fear of what it will cost us.

And we will get things wrong! We will indeed offend. We will say the wrong thing and do the wrong thing. But remember – God turns out failures into masterpieces!

So let's not be afraid of failure, of everything going wrong. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we can change and adapt and do new things successfully and the Church doesn't fall apart! So, let's not be afraid to take risks.

For by God's grace, and for some reason known only to himself, God has entrusted to us the sharing of the Gospel in this place. And even in our failures, God's love will be known, even when we fall short, God's glory will shine, even when we have not the right words, God's message will be shared. And out of his Church God will create a masterpiece.

So let us serve, knowing God's grace will be all we need.

PRAYER

Loving God,
Artist of creation,
You turn mistakes into master-pieces,
You turn empty churches into places of worship,
You turn shy doubting people into mighty witnesses.
That's your way Lord,
That's what you have always done
And that's what you want to do with us.
By your grace you invite us to be your voice,
By your grace you take even our stumbling efforts and turn them into powerful
declarations of faith and witness.

So ever powerful One,
Enable us to trust you,
To give ourselves in your service.
Asking that you make a master-piece out of us.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

