

**Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
3rd August 2021**

READINGS

The LORD makes firm the steps
of the one who delights in him;
though he may stumble, he will not fall,
for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

Psalm 37:23-24

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

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor darkest powers, neither the present nor the future, nor any force, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:26-28, 31-39

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 in to the whitewashed wall, where the contents left a large ugly 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. And 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 and added 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. And God does the same with us. God takes all the events of our lives, all that has happened to us, and, by his grace, he makes a masterpiece out of us.

Or as Paul puts it in our reading:

"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 the foul ups, and the let downs, and the disasters. God makes them all into moments of glory.

Sometimes we are so afraid as Christians. We are so afraid that we will get things wrong, that we will say the wrong thing, that we will do the wrong thing, that we end up doing nothing at all. Uncertainty and fear lead to the cry "Oh I couldn't do that!"

But that is certainly not the way God's people should be. We should not be afraid of failure, or of things going wrong. For God will accomplish his purposes even through our mistakes. For by his grace, God turns our disasters into moments of glory.

Consider the case of John Newton. Although he grew up in Christian home, he chose to abandon his faith, reject God, and live for his own pleasures. As a young man, he strayed about as far from God as any person can get, indulging in every vice available. He even became involved in the lucrative but brutal African slave trade. Yet Out of Newton's mistakes, God used his eyewitness testimony in Parliament to help put an end to the slave trade. Out of Newton's mistakes, God birthed the most famous and moving song the world has ever known: Amazing Grace. Out of Newton's mistakes, millions of lives have been touched and blessed.

John Newton's tombstone is inscribed with these words:

“Once an infidel and libertine ... by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy.”

So let us not be afraid. And, whether for success or for failure, let us set out to serve God with all that we are and all that we have.

PRAYER

Father God,
You turn mistakes into master-pieces.
You turn churches into places of worship,
You turn shy doubting people into mighty witnesses.
That's your way Lord,
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.

Lord God,
Enable us to trust you
To give ourselves in your service.
Guide and lead us,
And make a master-piece of us.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

