

St Brandon's 23 June 24
2 Cor 6:13; Mark 4: 35-end

Prayer

Speak to us Lord through your word.
Give us ears to hear you and hearts to respond
to your challenge and your love,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

On this **Volunteer Sunday**, I want to look at today's readings in the light of immense gratitude for everyone who gives and has given so much to the life and ministry of St Brandon's. *Thank you!* There will be another, tangible thank you over coffee in the shape of special biscuits, by the way!

Thank you, and thank God, for the ways you have worked together, with Christ, and *not* taken the grace of God in vain, as Paul puts it in the first verse of 2 Corinthians 6 which Wilfred read a few moments ago.

I know there are people sitting here today *who've worked together with God* in this place for decades, not least through the very difficult years when the building was all but destroyed by fire, and more recently the pandemic years when we faced fear and uncertainty and had to rethink so many aspects of life and worship.

We all work together with Christ, in and through his grace, receiving his all-sufficient strength and endurance to keep going, keep moving chairs, attending meetings, serving coffee, sweeping floors, keeping accounts, cleaning toilets, polishing brass, stacking hymn books, welcoming visitors.

Some of us have served for years and now need to rest, to be served by others- that is good and it's always important to know when to step back from roles, as well as stepping *into* them.

Some of us may be growing weary and want a new challenge or change of team, maybe that's you today.

Or perhaps you think there are so many people already involved here that you're not needed, when the truth is that what *you* bring will be unique and hugely valuable to the rest of the team you join. By offering to 'have a go' you will be such an encouragement to everyone else.

And so to today's readings, starting with Paul writing to the Corinthians, this letter which we have been reading through since the start of June.

It may not seem an obvious choice when on a 'recruitment drive', to read Paul's accounts of everything that seemingly goes **wrong** in his life. There's another list in today's passage:

*afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings,
imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger...*

But we've seen how Paul mentions these things to show that God is powerfully with him, whatever happens.

Frequently, it is in the dark times that he sees God's light most clearly. I wonder if you relate to that?

Jesus himself suffered all the things Paul lists, Jesus knows, cares and asks us to trust him even when it is most difficult.

It's ok to be confused, disappointed, angry or despairing – to be honest, not to pretend that life is all roses- we know it isn't.

Jesus's own life took him to the cross, the most humiliating and dishonourable death ever devised. But from this came resurrection and the living evidence of God's power and unbreakable love.

I rejoiced recently, to hear one of our number talking about how, when faced with being put 'out of action' through an accident, when in pain, distressed and frustrated, they discovered just how loved they are. The help and kindness of friends and neighbours made God's love real as it was shared in very practical ways. What seemed

disastrous turned into encouragement and blessing. You may be able to recall similar situations in your own life. Please note God does not *send* these troubles, but is with us in them, which can transform how we go through them.

Paul also catalogues his sufferings to show, in contrast to the Corinthian culture of self-promotion and success, which Mike talked about last Sunday, that he is weak, human and fragile, just like us. Paul, and we, can only serve God in the strength and grace Christ gives us: I know I can relate to that. Remember those fragile clay jars, which allow the light of Christ to shine through?

Perhaps that's what we need to hear today, that however weak or inadequate we feel, however uncertain our future or painful our past, Christ is with us in the reality of it all and will *never* leave us. He's not looking for perfect disciples, just willing ones, who will be part of the adventure of sharing the good news of Jesus, in word and deed.

Today St Brandon's is not looking for well-qualified, perfect volunteers, just willing ones. Please don't offer out of duty or guilt, please *do* offer if you want to 'have a go', with others, join a team, laugh, cry and work together as we all depend on God and each other to keep going. Whatever you offer will be hugely appreciated.

I close with one last thought about today's gospel. When I was in Sunday School, we sang a cheerful song about this story which went like this:

*With Jesus in the boat we can smile at the storm,
smile at the storm, smile at the storm.*

*With Jesus in the boat we can smile at the storm,
as we go sailing by...*

I'm not sure that was all together helpful. The impression it gave me was that, as long as I was a Christian (with Jesus in my boat), no storm would ever touch me.

But life is not like that, and my life hasn't been, for all I am so thankful for many blessings too. I and my loved ones have not been immune from illness, brokenness

and loss. I've known many failures and problems in my life and ministry. Things often have not gone according to plan, but in and through it all, Jesus was and is with me. And I am struck, as I hear this familiar story today, that Jesus is dependent on his disciples. He knows they're fishermen, locals used to the weather on the lake. He knows they work at night, and he puts himself in their hands as he rests, then sleeps in the back of the boat. He trusts them.

Jesus didn't need a boat to get home- he could have walked on the water! But he chose to trust in and depend on his friends to get him home. And when the weather changed and they couldn't manage, he was there. His only rebuke of them wasn't about their failure to sail through the storm, but about their lack of faith- trust- in him.

So too, Jesus has entrusted his church, this church, to weak human disciples like us. He trusts us to keep this boat afloat, if you like. When we hit storms, he will be there. He will work in power and amaze us with his provision and goodness..

There may be times when he asks us to sail into the night, cross the lake, work together to trim the sails and steer the rudder, against a storm

He has chosen us, for this time and this place, and every one has their part to play. He will never leave us and we can trust in him.

We're going to pause for a moment's silence before we sing our next hymn, as a prayer in response to what we have heard.