

## **Matt. 10:24-39, Romans 6:1b-11 Alive to God**

21 June 2020, online.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our God. Amen.

For a number of years, Gerald and I used the Bible Reading Fellowship notes called Alive to God. That phrase is taken directly from our first reading from St Paul's letter to the Romans. The Good News translation says: 'You are to think of yourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned, but living in fellowship with God through Christ Jesus.' Which is a bit of a long paraphrase of the original: 'Consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus.'

Dead to sin. Alive to God. That's a pretty clear cut contrast, and both Paul and Jesus are making clear that the call to Christian discipleship doesn't really have any room for compromise. You can't just be a *bit* Christian! Just as you can't be a *bit* married. You are one thing or the other.

And both Jesus and St Paul make it clear that living as a Christian will bring its problems: you may expect to be scorned, disliked, ridiculed, excluded because of your faith and commitment. But don't worry, says Jesus, God knows all about it. And that is what really matters: Jesus tells us even the hairs on your head are all counted (pity John isn't here – I could say that wouldn't take long in his case!) What a beautiful way of expressing just how important you are to God; nothing escapes his notice in his universe. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without God noticing. Your life is in God's hands. Sparrows may indeed fall; bad and sad things may happen in our lives, but they matter to God; he sees, he knows, he understands, and he is there to help us through. As Julian of Norwich put it: God did not say, "You will never have a rough passage, you will never be over-strained, you will never feel uncomfortable," but he did say "You will never be overcome. "

This saying of Jesus tells us that YOU matter. You may be fortunate enough to know that you matter to your family, or to friends. But Jesus tells us that whoever you are, and whatever you are, you matter deeply to God. And because you matter to God, you matter to his body here on earth, to the Church. You are linked, you are connected, you belong.

The whole realm of nature shows us that we are created to depend on each other for our survival and well-being. I may have told you before that the Greek word for someone who insists on going it alone, doing his own thing all the time is . . . 'idiot'. Yes, folks, that is the real meaning of our word idiot, one who thinks he or she can just go their own sweet way and ignore the rest of the world.

That's why we had that song at the beginning about all God's creatures having a place in the choir. It echoes St Paul's saying about how the different parts of the body all have their role to play and all belong with each other, and how the whole just is not complete if any part is missing. We are all creatures, and we all have our place in the choir, our role to play.

All God's creatures got a place in the choir. Do you feel that you are singing your part? God doesn't say, "Can you sing well enough to be in my choir?". No, He says "I have made you and given you all that you need so that, with my Spirit alive in you, you can sing out loud for me and sing all the right notes – just get yourself into that choir and let me do the singing through you!" But you have to be willing to be part of that choir, to let people see you playing or singing your part. No hiding away and trying to sing on your own in the bathroom.

OK, I've think we've taken that metaphor far enough now, and you'll all be thinking 'I have no choice just now but to sing on my own in the privacy of my own home.' But, of course, we're not just talking about singing. We're talking about committing our whole lives to God in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, led and guided by our Lord Jesus. Being alive to God and dead to sin.

Dead to sin. Alive to God. Is it really that clear-cut for us? I suspect that most of us, if we're honest, try to have a foot in both camps. It is all too easy to have a bit of 'God in our lives', but are our lives really 'in God'? It's all too easy to have faith rather as a side dish to the main meal of our life! To think of God as being there when we need him, and to forget that, in truth, he also needs us, he needs us to be playing our part, every day, if his Kingdom is to come, on earth as it is in heaven.

How dead to sin am I? It's not that I deliberately put on a show to make it appear that I am alive to God and dead to sin. I know what I should be doing and saying. And I try to surrender my will, my mind to God. But it's a good job all my thoughts and reactions aren't written in bold letters across my forehead for all to see! I would be pretty ashamed of some of the stuff that goes through my head! Does that make me a hypocrite? I hope not. Rather I think it shows me to be a work in progress. I'm on that journey with the Lord, and I trust that he is leading me in the right direction, but I'm a bit slow sometimes, and it's going to take a lifetime for him to get me where I ought to be!

Sometimes, as Christians, we are put to shame by the compassionate deeds of those who would say they have no faith. It's important that we look at ourselves, examine our thoughts and measure them against the words of Jesus.

As I have been thinking about this sermon over the week, three different readings have come my way, all making the same basic point, all challenging us. They have challenged me, and I want to share them with you. I offer them to you to ponder over.

Amy Carmichael wrote: If monotony tries me, and I cannot stand drudgery; if stupid people fret me and little ruffles set me on edge; if I make much of the trifles of life, then I know nothing of Calvary love. ... If interruptions annoy me and private cares make me impatient . . . then I know nothing of Calvary love. ... If souls can suffer alongside, and

I hardly know it, because the spirit of discernment is not in me, then I know nothing of Calvary love. (Source: *That Way and No Other*)

And Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: Are you worried because you find it so hard to believe? Don't be surprised at the difficulty of faith, if there is some part of your life where you are consciously resisting or disobeying the commandment of Jesus. Is there some part of your life which you are refusing to surrender at his behest, some sinful passion, maybe, or some animosity, some hope, perhaps your ambition or your reason? If so, you must not be surprised that you have not received the Holy Spirit, that prayer is difficult, or that your request for faith remains unanswered ... The person who disobeys cannot believe. Only if you obey can you believe.

And from God Calling comes the command to:  
Love and Trust. Let no unkind thoughts of any dwell in your hearts, *then* I can act with all My Spirit-power, with nothing to hinder.  
(*God Calling*)

So may we surrender ourselves to Jesus so that the Father can act through us with all his Spirit-power and we shall sing out our part in his choir day by day. You may think you only have a very little voice which isn't going to make any difference. You may think that you can't change the world. But in fact you can. We can. Just by being Christlike in our little bit of the world, in all our dealings with those around us, in the letters we might send to our MP, in taking a stand for truth and justice and peace, we can make a difference. That is how the kingdom comes. Not by some great revolution swept in by powerful clever people. That's not what Jesus showed us. But bit by bit, person by person, surrendering to the love of God and living His way, dead to sin and alive to God, we change the world around us and let his kingdom come. Amen. (Before our next hymn, I invite you to listen to a song by Garth Hewitt, inspired by today's Gospel reading. It speaks for itself. Some of you will know it, but if not, just listen, and let it speak to you.)

## Confession

When I say, God by your grace, you may like to respond '**forgive us**':

For the unkind thoughts we have harboured in our minds,  
And the kindly words we failed to share;  
For the false gods who received our worship  
And the wrong roads we chose to follow,  
God, by your grace,  
**Forgive us.**

For the hidden hurts we have held onto too tightly,  
And the promises which we never kept;  
For the careless use of our time and money  
And the lame excuses we should never have made,  
God, by your grace,  
**Forgive us.**

*We have a few moments of quiet to reflect on our lives:*

Hear and believe these words of Jesus:

Your sins are forgiven.  
Go in peace.  
Come and follow me. (*pause*)

Glory to the Creator who gives us life,  
Glory to Jesus whose love remakes us,  
Glory to the Spirit, companion on our journey.  
Glory be to God. **Amen.**

## Collect:

Faithful Creator,  
Whose mercy never fails;  
Deepen our faithfulness to you  
And to your Living Word,

Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Lord's Prayer.

**Peace.** As we have been one in prayer, now we join in spirit, as we remember one another and in our hearts offer each other the peace of the Lord.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,  
Since as members of one body you are called to peace.  
The peace of the Lord be always with you.

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## Blessing

May God give to you and to all those you love  
His comfort and his peace,  
His light and his joy,  
In this world and the next.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

## Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
In the name of Christ, Amen.