

Readings for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

30th August 2026

First Reading: Jeremiah 15:15-21

O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me, and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult. Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail.

Therefore thus says the Lord: If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

Second Reading: Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Gospel: St Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their

life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

A Reflection for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sometimes, as a preacher, I look at the readings set for a particular day and think that God must be having a laugh with me. Although I wasn't preaching yesterday, as well as being the day of Anne's ordination to the priesthood, it was also the day when the church remembers the beheading of John the Baptist, with readings that reflect that event. It was an unfortunate coincidence, though perhaps clergy might think not without some parallels! However, back in May, Bishop Mark and I exchanged wry smiles and then decided that other readings would be more appropriate and kinder.

Then, a couple of weeks ago, when I started looking at the readings for today, the day on which Anne celebrates the Eucharist as a priest for the first time, I find we have a Gospel reading which relates Peter making one of the bigger mistakes of his career as a disciple. Surely, God has a sense of humour!

As Anne reminded us last week when thinking about Peter, and as Ven John Green reminded those of us present in St Mary's Ullapool the week before when speaking about Mary, God didn't call those people to his work because they were 'special' in some way, or super-holy, or super-good. He called them as he calls us, as ordinary people, all of us called to do his work in the world, with each called to specific tasks. And our careers as disciples are almost certainly just as up and down as Peter's was.

Fortunately, for me today, as Anne begins a new ministry amongst us, we have a reading from Romans, which is more helpful as we think about how we are all called.

Paul spent much of the letter to the Romans discussing how the saving work of Jesus Christ enabled the reconciliation of all people, both Jews and Gentiles, to God. In the first part of chapter 12, which we heard last Sunday, he considered how that reconciliation to God is then expressed in the world by Christians. Because we have received God's mercy, Paul said that a proper response should be transformed minds and lives, giving back to the Christian community and the world. In a familiar theme of his, which occurs in more than one of his letters, Paul reminded his audience that the church is one body with many members; that not all the members have the same function, but each person has different gifts and that together they make up the whole.

Today's passage from Romans follows on directly from last week's, describing how living that transformed life looks in practice. It all starts with love. Paul begins this section with the words, 'Let love be genuine...'. Whatever we do should be rooted in love, authentic love that cares. Authentic love is not pretty words, but about how we behave in practice. That makes this a demanding passage. Paul tells us that such authentic love is manifest in characteristics such as steadfastness, rejoicing, hope, perseverance, patience, prayer. Authentic love addresses practical human need: rejoicing and sorrowing with others; being hospitable and sharing what we have with others, especially with those in need; living in harmony with one another, even with those whom we disagree or might consider to be enemies.

Scholars think that the church in Rome, to which Paul was writing, was a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians, not without its tensions, and falling somewhat short of Paul's ideal. So Paul exhorts his audience to overcome their differences with that genuine love, showing mutual affection and honouring one another. He urges them to avoid attitudes that lead to division such as looking down on others, or anger, or seeking revenge for perceived wrongs; attitudes that spring more from hatred than from love. Instead, they are to do what is right, and leave any response to the wrongs of others to God - they are to turn the other cheek. By behaving in this way, he says they may heap burning coals on the heads of those who have wronged them. In other words, their response in love may mean that the 'enemy' may be so overcome with remorse that they amend their behaviour and are drawn into God's mercy and love.

Paul's words remain relevant - he could equally well be writing to the church and the world today. Rooted in our experience of God's love and mercy towards us, we are called to show that same love and mercy towards others in the circumstances in which we find ourselves ... even when they do not reciprocate. As Christians, like the early church in Rome, we are called to high standards. We are called to live in a way that doesn't bring discredit to God. Like Peter, we will manage that at times, and we will all make mistakes and fail at other times. As always, the important thing is that we keep on trying.

As part of yesterday's ordination service, Bishop Mark said the following words:

In baptism every disciple is called to make Jesus known as Saviour and Lord and to share his work in renewing the world. Some, by ordination, are given particular tasks.

In the circumstances of our lives, we are all called to different things. Being a teacher, a cleaner, a doctor, a chef, a manager, a gardener, an accountant, a child minder, a coffee maker, an encourager, a carer, ... or a priest ... I could go on and on... they are all callings. And within the circumstances of those callings, every one of us has their own gifts and skills. What God asks of us is that we use our particular gifts for the good of all people, living out God's love to others as we use those gifts and skills.

Clergy are no different, they have their own gifts and skills and are simply called to a different task. So don't let them become big-headed - last week's passage from Romans contained the warning, 'do not think of yourself more highly than you ought'. And, whatever you do, don't put clergy on a pedestal! It will only lead to disappointment. Clergy are ordinary people, just like you, with all the same struggles and failings, who also, just like you, and just like Peter, also have moments of insight, inspiration and goodness.