Gods judgement

Romans 2:1-16

14th Feb 2016

St Francis – Baptism of Adir

[Faith is a gift of God, it’s also a gift given by our parents, and given by the church. That’s what we celebrate today in the baptism of Adir.

But at the start of Lent it’s also a message for all of us.

What do we do with this wonderful gift of faith in our own lives?

Play with it?

Use it? (participate in church, spiritual practices, evangelism).

Personalise it? (Make it their own, make a commitment of baptism/confirmation)

Or leave it on the shelf to gather dust?]

Is it me but a lot of famous people have died recently – David Bowie to Alan Rickman to Terry Wogan. They have been commemorated in all kinds of different ways. Which leads me to think how would *you* like to be remembered? A glowing tribute from our minister or close friend? A name in the memorial book? An obituary in the Times? For some of us we’ve hardly started on life – like little Adir here today. Others of us have more of a track record, or certainly more years. But would you like your life to be judged?

There’s been a hoo-ha about Terry Wogan because the Telegraph wrote quite a critical piece about him, saying he had a “reservoir of bile” towards those he didn’t like. His family didn’t like him being judged and neither do we.

Have you ever stood before a judge? I have never and I imagine it is a very scary thing. The closest I got to it was having to report to a police station with my driver’s licence after being stopped. Now I couldn’t find it anywhere and I took myself down the station and confessed I had lost it. To my utter horror the officer behind the desk was my neighbour’s daughter, who then proceeded to read me my rights! *You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.*

A bit embarrassing.

We’ve started a new series on Romans, Paul’s master theological treatise which explores issues such as sin, judgement, faith, justification, grace, new life and new purpose. Many would argue that it is the fullest statement of the gospel and how it works out in everyday life. Last week we looked at how all of us have sinned but how God will cleanse us if we confess to him. Today we are looking at God’s judgement.

We all make judgements all the time. We discern, we sift, we assess. If you take a driving test, your ability to drive is being judged, if you take an exam in science your ability to understand science is being judged. Paul was addressing a group of Christians in Rome who were a mixture of Jewish-background and pagan-background believers. The Jews generally were particularly fond of judging the pagans or gentiles. The Jews would claim that they are chosen, they have the law to guide them and that they worshipped the one true God, not idols. Therefore they were automatically better than anyone else. This toxic spirit of judgement was about to become a car crash. So Paul had to put the record straight.

This brings me to my first point.

**Everyone gets judged**

What Paul is saying that everyone gets judged. One day. Maybe not today or tomorrow but sometime in the future. And it is by God, and God alone; no one else. So get used to it! There is a thing in modern society which says I don’t want to be judged about anything I do. There was an advertising campaign recently called This Girl Can which show picture of sweaty women exercising. It turns out the reason fewer women than men do exercise is fear of judgement. It was encouraging women to overcome that fear of not being good enough and to go for it. That is human judgement which is all around us in this world, but it is not God’s judgement. God’s judgement is different.

**Each according to the truth they have**

This brings me to my second point. Each of us will be judged according to the truth we have received.

To the Jews Paul says, you will be judged by the standards of the law. You think you are it, but you will be judged by what you want received. If you have received much, much will be expected of you.

To the gentile pagans, a different standard will apply. You will be judged by the voice of your conscience. Even those not of our faith can act according to their conscience. I have been reading the book about Malala Yousafzai. It is a remarkable moving story of a young Muslim girl who campaigned for the rights of girls to have an education and was shot in the head by the Taliban in 2012. Miraculously she survived with no brain damage. She comes across as a person full of faith and prayer and gratitude to God. It could have been written by a Christian. I am sure God’s hand is upon her and surely she will come before God as one who followed her conscience with tremendous courage and determination.

**God’s forbearance**

Thirdly, God’s judgement is in the context of kindness, forbearance and patience as it says in verse 4. The purpose of this judgement is not to condemn us, write us off or throw us on the scrapheap, but to get us to change.

Let’s look at those three words in a bit more detail

1. Kindness – chrestos in Greek. This is the kindness that Jesus displays calling down the mean tax-collector Zacchaeus from the tree – a restorative kindness, that seeks to bring hope and reconciliation.
2. Forbearance – anoche in Greek. This is the same word as calling a truce – the end of hostilities. It is a period of calm in which true peace can be made, but not unlimited in nature.
3. Patience – makrothumia in Greek. It means patience of some who has a right to vengeance but refuses to use it.

Let’s summarise what God’s judgement is like – it is a truce, a withholding of revenge and a kindness that is longing to restore. What’s not to like?

Yes, we will get judged when Jesus comes again, but in the mean time we get countless chances to change and the purpose of judgement is to help us improve.

When I was at vicar college, I was sent on a placement to a church where I was placed under a vicar called Rev Janet Henderson. She got me to do my first all age service. It was a disaster. No one answered any questions, no-one volunteered to join in on the day. Afterwards she wrote me an A4 sheet of what I had done wrong. I was well and truly judged and quite angry at her response. But, she gave me another chance to put it right. She didn’t sack me but gave me space and time to change. The next occasion was a school assembly – my first ever, in front of hundreds of children. I took her lessons on board and it went really well, then I realised why she had done it.

God’s judgement is kind, restorative and postponed.

He gives all of us endless chances.

Yes, if we resist all invitations from him, we will have to stand on our own record which may not be pleasant. Especially at this time of lent we need to take God’s judgement seriously.

But we can take comfort from another thing: God’s judgement is through Jesus, our brother, saviour and friend. Who could ask for better than that!

Amen.