

St Botolph's Church Worthing 9 October 2016

Reverend Roger Walker

Jeremiah 29: 1, 4 - 7

2 Timothy 2: 8 - 15

Luke 17: 11- 19

Our three readings today don't seem to have much connection with each other. First we heard Jeremiah advising the Jews who were exiled in Babylon to live contentedly there. Just beyond today's Reading he tells them they are going to be there for 70 years! Then St Paul, writing to Timothy from prison, reiterates the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ and tells Timothy to urge Christians to accept this without quarrelling about exactly how it will be. The worldwide church would be more united if it had heeded these words down the centuries. Finally, in the well-known story of Jesus healing the ten lepers, of whom only one returns to say thank you. We have an emphasis on thankfulness.

So today we are being urged to be content, not to quarrel and to be thankful and - you know - those three are the ingredients of a good and peaceful earthly life with the anticipation through St Paul's words to Timothy of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. What more could we ask for? So let's examine our lives in the light of these three elements. First of all, are we content? It is easy quite glibly to say yes, but each of us knows there are things we wish we had. They can be material things: wanting a better house, new furniture, a new kitchen or car. The list can go on and on and there is a danger that we can be consumed by jealousy seeing friends having things we wish we had, and contentment goes out of the window. We must be aware that God will supply our needs but in no way will he encourage our greed. In Paul's **first** letter to Timothy he tells him that the love of money is the root of all evil but godliness with contentment is a great gain.

Contentment is not just with material things: we also need to be physically content. Almost all of us have some ailment or another we can either complain about it and make ourselves miserable, or we can accept what cannot be cured and be content with what we are able to do. St Paul tells the Corinthians how he has to cope with a 'thorn in his flesh' which God would not heal in answer to his prayers, showing him that God's grace and power could sustain him in weakness, and this is something many of us can relate to. Finally, we need to be spiritually content and that is what God was leading Paul to. We need to trust God for our spiritual nourishment now and for our eternal destiny with him. This, of course, leads us on to the quarrelling in 2 Timothy, because what Timothy's congregation were quarrelling about was their interpretation of different words used by Paul and the other apostles. We can find ourselves doing this with interpretations of different passages in the Bible. One of our problems is that we are so often trying to express eternal truths in temporal terms, and this is just beyond the power of human language. So rather than quarrelling about each other's ideas, let us rather accept that we can all see things in different ways. Most importantly of all,

God probably sees them in a different way to us. Tolerance really is a far better way to live together than quarrelling. It is much more likely to engender contentment in our spiritual lives.

So we can see a sort of relationship between contentment and quarrelling, in that the first positive one - contentment - can set aside the second negative one - quarrelling. Now, can we find any link with thankfulness? The point of the story of Jesus and the ten lepers was that, although all were healed, only one came back to say thank you. He was a Samaritan, a despised outsider as far as the Jews were concerned. I suppose you could say that Jews quarrelled with Samaritans and only got together when they were all outcast lepers and that once they were healed they were content. It's amazing, isn't it, how many links you can make when you start reading the Bible! But this is rather pushing it and the much better link is between contentment and thankfulness. We know that when we are content in all the areas of our lives our prayers much more naturally contain thankfulness to God. Even then it is very easy for us to forget to say thank you to God when he blesses us and answers our prayers - nine out of ten lepers did.

More important still is to say thank you to God when things are not going well, but he does continue to uphold us. If we can do this whatever may be happening to us materially and physically, we can be right with God spiritually - and content. So perhaps God is saying to us today 'cut out quarrelling and be content and thankful'. Not a bad recipe for a Christian life.

AMEN

Rev Roger Walker

9.10.16