

Paul had complete confidence in his own credentials: he was a true Jew – circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, an Israeli of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee keeping the Law of Moses, and counting on his faultless keeping of the Law; zealous for the purity of the Jewish faith to the extent of persecuting the Christians!

That was before his Damascus experience. Now he counted all these gains as losses, indeed everything as a loss compared to the great gain of knowing Christ Jesus; no longer did he have a 'righteousness' of his own, but through the gift of God in Christ, who is faithful. Now he sought only to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

Looking back in life, we too may have accomplished much – many things of which we can be proud, many things that others may have admired. Our society requires everyone to study hard, to achieve excellence, high qualifications, to get 'good' jobs and earn well.

Yet Paul is saying that all these are nothing compared to the great riches of knowing Christ, sharing in his resurrection. That doesn't mean that our children and grandchildren should not study and work for qualifications. Nor that we should rubbish our own achievements. It does mean we should not trust in them to qualify us as good Christian people. It does not qualify us at all in God's eyes.

Our society suffers from the 'Protestant work ethic'. It is harmful, as people with low abilities are often discounted. The burden of having to prove themselves is too heavy.

People are admired if they become famous, if they receive great acclaim in scientific discoveries, engineering, politics, climbing mountains, making the top of the charts, winning Wimbledon. Young people are driven to achieve, achieve, achieve, through hard work.

It can lead to despair. For few can continue to be at the top for ever, and most do not get anywhere near it. The discouragement can undermine confidence. Even as age advances, strength lessens and memory is impaired, the pressure of not being able to keep up can cause depression. Yet for everyone, this is the time for exploring the riches of knowing Christ.

Our reading from Matthew talks about the fruit of people's lives. Jesus said, "A landowner planted a vineyard and rented it to tenants", expecting that they would give him fruit at the end of each season. But they decided to take ownership of the vineyard and refused to give the landlord's servants any fruit; indeed they beat them and killed his son".

The fruit that the Holy Spirit grows in God's people is love, genuine love, freely given, often forgiving, loving each other, especially in the church – that's what brings people in and helps them to stay; loving God and loving them. Not to think, "they won't come again anyway". A close-knit community means no-one is left isolated; there is real sharing and intimacy, being vulnerable with each other. Even those who are not able to get to the building are still the church, and can keep in contact with that wonderful instrument invented so long ago – the telephone!

The church is the vineyard.

## Prayers:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the great gift of Jesus Christ,  
thank you for calling us your beloved,  
strengthening us with your Holy Spirit  
and giving us your promises.

Forgive us for our slowness in following you,  
for the times when we have trusted in ourselves,  
our own abilities and qualifications,  
and for looking down on others.  
Grant us a new start in love, joy, and humility.

Father, strengthen speedy testing for coronavirus;  
encourage those who are overworked in laboratories;  
guide those who make the decisions,  
and cause all of us to work together for good.

Give wisdom to those who find fault and blame.

O Lord our Rock,  
with you there is nothing to fear;  
without you nothing is fruitful.  
Cause us to love you with all our heart  
and to learn how to love others well.

The Lord's Prayer

## Services for this week: Oct 4<sup>th</sup>:

Communion in Grandborough at 9am

Communion in Leamington Hastings at 11am

## Services for next week: Oct 11<sup>th</sup>

Communion in Flecknoe 9am

Pet Service in Willoughby 11am; bring your dog, cat, snake, pony, or favourite teddy, for a short service and blessing in church for smaller animals, outside for horses, alpacas and elephants! Please have a safe lead or basket or some way to help them feel safe.

Evening Prayer in Grandborough church at 6pm

**Note: Willoughby Church** was open for private prayer on Sundays but that is no longer possible for lack of staff. However, anyone wishing to visit the church may ring Anne on 01788 438 561, or ask for the key from others on the PCC and they will open the church, & leave you to enjoy it.

All our churches are suffering from lack of staff. If you love having a church in your village, can you offer an hour or so to assist, perhaps once a month, so that we can keep our churches going for longer? And we value your prayers for all that is needed.

## The Blessing:

May God bless you and keep you,  
may his face shine upon you  
and give you peace.

God in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
Amen

