

Greenways Benefice Weekly Devotional (No 29)
Sunday 4th October 2020

Bible Readings

1 Thessalonians 4 :1 – 12, Jeremiah 17 : 5 – 8

Authentic Lives

We have enjoyed a beautiful spring and summer this year which has been a huge blessing to many, particularly because of the strange, difficult times we're living in. Spring began with 'lockdown' but the lovely weather meant we were able to get out into the fresh air even if it was only in our back gardens. Many people have spent more time outside enjoying the amazing natural beauty this year than they ever have before.

Now, we are beginning to notice a change in the colours and sounds of the season. Autumn has arrived, and with it comes harvest. We are very blessed in the UK, especially in this rural area, with an abundance of harvest produce. This year we seemed to have the right amount of sunshine and rain to encourage a good crop. My neighbour intends growing some grape vines another year. I read the other day that the roots of some vines can go down as much as 40 feet to reach the water table so that the vine might bear good fruit! The deeper the root – the stronger the plant.

Our theme this week is 'authentic lives'. In order for our lives as Christians to be authentic and fruitful we need to put down deep 'spiritual roots'. Jeremiah 17: 7 and 8 (Old Testament) says "Blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

A well known Bible teacher once said "Authentic, Christian maturity is not accidental – it takes place when we draw on the resources God has provided". God wants us to live lives that draw nourishment from a close relationship with and a daily dependence on Him, the God who can be trusted.

If our spiritual roots only draw from the surface waters of life's circumstances it will be almost impossible to sustain authentic Christian living. They have to go deeper. The more deeply our roots go down into a relationship with God, the more sustainable and fruitful will our lives above ground be. Can I suggest three resources from which we can draw to enable us.

The first is to read God's Word, the Bible regularly.

The more we read the Bible the more alive it becomes to us. It reminds us of the amazing love our God has for each one of us; it guides us for the future; it challenges and teaches us. It tells us that we have a sovereign God who is in control and that we belong to a kingdom that is unshakeable. The more time we give to reading and digesting God's Word the more unshakeable we shall be in times of trouble and confusion.

How do we build up an appetite for reading the Bible?

Think of a cow! It has four compartments in its stomach. First it grazes the grass, then later at its leisure, it sits comfortably and, we often see them do this, it chews the cud. That is, it regurgitates the food and chews it a second time, making sure that every nutrient has been absorbed. It's the reason for the four compartments and part of the digestive process. How amazing that green grass going through this process eventually ends up as creamy white milk! Our Creator is amazing!

When we read the Bible, it's a good thing to ruminate (a bit like the cow), go back to it through the day, mull over the passage prayerfully, and digest what God is saying to you. We get to know God better and the Bible becomes more alive to us.

The second resource is prayer.

Prayer makes it possible for us not to be a victim of our circumstances – but a victor. Sometimes our circumstances seem to conspire to crowd in and defeat us but instead of allowing that to happen let's consider what we will do with those circumstances through prayer. It's through prayer and the power that comes from our connection with God that we can be victors. The last word is never with our circumstances but with God.

Our circumstances may sometimes remain unchanged after we have prayed but prayer and the power that it brings through the connection with God enables us to be strong in those circumstances and to see beyond them. And our spiritual roots grow deeper into God. He can turn obstacles, disappointments and difficulties into open doors of opportunity.

The author and evangelist, Dr. E. Stanley Jones said: "When I pray I'm like an electric bulb put into the socket, full of light and power. When I don't pray I'm like that same bulb pulled out of the socket - no light, no power".

In prayer, our weakness is linked to God's omnipotence. And His strength enables us to be victorious.

The third resource is the Holy Spirit.

Many people find the doctrine of the Holy Spirit perplexing, but in the Bible the Holy spirit is seen in terms of power, not puzzlement. The other day I came across this definition of the Holy Spirit – 'The Holy Spirit is God in action'. He is the third person in the Holy Trinity. Throughout the Old Testament the Holy Spirit sometimes moved and touched peoples' lives in an amazing way. But it was not until Jesus had come and completed the work of salvation, through His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension that the Holy Spirit was able to come and stay amongst us.

When we read God's Word it is the Holy Spirit who teaches, directs and brings to life what God is saying to us. It's the power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to be connected to God in prayer. And it's the divine power of God that the Holy Spirit brings to live in us as we trust in all that Jesus has done for us. As our spiritual roots tap deeper into the power of God it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is displayed in our lives.

In his letter to the Christian church at Thessalonica in chapter 4 Paul reminded them that love, one of the fruits of the Spirit, has to be reflected more and more.

As we read the Bible regularly, prayerfully, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives, the power of God will challenge us, bless us, comfort and teach us day by day. The fruit of the Holy Spirit will be displayed and our lives will be a reflection of Jesus.

Let's pray together -

Gracious Lord, as our spiritual roots grow deeper into you, help us to reflect true authentic Christian living as we allow the Holy Spirit to be our teacher and guide, giving us the resources we need to share your love and grace. Amen.

God bless,
Veronica