

The Failure Club!

Isaiah 11¹⁻¹⁰; Psalm 72¹⁻⁷; Romans 15⁴⁻¹³; Matthew 3¹⁻¹²

I am not worthy to carry his sandals. (Matthew 3¹¹)

Welcome to *the Failure Club!*

Because we encounter John the Baptist in the Gospel today there is nothing that I can say that approaches his rudeness. The **Pharisees** and the **Sadducees** were sworn enemies and such was the threat that John the Baptist posed to their religious domination and comfortable existence that he announced their arrival at the Jordan with the words of welcome: **you brood of vipers!**

That recognition that we are failures is the beginning of hope for us!

The Psalm today is a prayer for the King in Israel - it is that he would be just short of God to the people in a reign characterised by **justice** (especially for the **poor**), **prosperity for the the people**, with success in campaigns to **crush the oppressor**. But the King (despite all his advantages) was a member of *the Failure Club!*

Just before we begin in Isaiah (at the end of chapter 10 we get the mention of the **axe** - the same axe that appears for the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew) and that axe has severed 60 years of Davidic dynasty. All that remains is **a shoot** growing out of the **stump**.

- ✦ Did you recognise the famous member of *the Failure Club* referred to in Isaiah 11? Surely it is King Solomon that is described - **wisdom, understanding, counsel and might**. He fails in one aspect - **the fear of the Lord** which is so important that it is mentioned twice.
- ✦ Other members of *the Failure Club* are those who make judgements about people based on the senses - what matters are those things that shape the character of a person and known only to God - **righteousness** and **faithfulness**.
- ✦ Then there is a reference to another member of *the Failure Club*, to Adam. It was he who got the world into disorder, but the new Adam, the Messiah, will

reverse that: they world will be at peace with itself and the prey need have no fear of the predators - **wolf** and **lamb**; **leopard** and **kid**; **calf**, **lion** and **fatling**, **child** and **snake** (if that isn't an undoing of Eden, nothing is) are all safe together.

Paul has been talking about *the Failure Club* in the verses before we start our reading: **we who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak**.

- ✦ There are a number of encouragements: **endurance** and **encouragement** are God's gifts to us; **harmony** is our gift to one another; **welcome** is God's gift to us and **welcome** is our gift to each other; **hope** is God's gift to us and **joy** is our gift to God.
- ✦ I haven't missed the Advent reference to the **root of Jesse**, because to we the members of *the Failure Club* it is he - and he alone - who gives **hope**.

The Baptism that John speaks of is a baptism for failures - people who have something to **repent** about! But then, we all do.

- ✦ Any disciples of Rabbi's (and philosophers) in the 1st century were treated like slaves - they had to look after their leader. However, it was the case that feet were taboo: no slave was expected to wash feet or a student to carry shoes. John's particular contribution to *the Failure Club* is that he isn't worthy even for that for Jesus!

John's baptism anticipated something else (a good Advent theme) and what he promised becomes effective when Jesus picks up his ministry: the kingdom **of heaven**, living as God's forgiven people - is possible: with the promise of the **Holy Spirit** we don't just have **water** that cleanses but **fire** that purifies!

We arrive at *the Failure Club*, but we discover hope in God's message of salvation through Jesus and we end up as winners!

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit!