

Welcome Back!

Ezekiel 33:7-11; Psalm 119³³⁻⁴⁰; Romans 13^{8-end}; Matthew 18¹⁵⁻²¹

*Now is the moment for you to wake from sleep.
[Romans 13¹¹]*

Welcome back – we haven't had a congregation since the 15th March, but we have enjoyed rising to meet the challenges that have faced us and are glad that the congregation is Church is enriched and enhanced by those who continue to be with us on live-stream.

As always, God has been faithful and we have been trying!

The challenge we set for this year was for people to read the Bible in a year – and you have had plenty time to do it (I know that some have found parts of the Old Testament very challenging, but keep going in the hope of better things when the New Testament begins on October 1st). So very few know what is in the Bible and even for those who do, the temptation can be to just focus on the bits we like!

One of the verses that has been misused in this way is in our Gospel reading for today: **for when two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them.**

How often I have heard this used in prayer, assuming it is a positive thing. However, from the context in Matthew, it is clear that God is promising to be with the Church when it acts to discipline its members!

The naughty part of me, when I hear that verse piously invoking the Almighty, asks, *what have you been doing that needs disciplining?*

Paul tells us that **now is the moment for you to wake from sleep** and as we press the restart button on our congregational life together, there are some things in the readings that should shape our wakefulness:

- ✘ Ezekiel tells us that the duty of the people of faith is to be honest about wickedness and, when people complain, **our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us and we waste away**, we have to be blunt enough to

tell people to **turn from their wicked ways**. God says, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live.**

It is then that we can, as Paul invites us to, **live honourably**. The list of **revelling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarrelling and jealousy** may sound like a great weekend to some, but it deadens the soul and anaesthetises the conscience.

Sin destroys and it is the task of the people of God to be clear about this and to be clear in the simple message, STOP IT! The Church doesn't have to make friends, it has to make disciples and that begins in repentance! Then, with the Psalmist we can honestly say, **teach me the way of your statutes.**

- ✘ The command that Paul reminds us of, that we must **love one another**, is clarified in the Gospel as we are told how we should relate to one another. Love, as should be expressed between Christians, isn't a feeling but is practical.

We choose to be honest enough with each other to clear the air and to keep it clear. We care about each other enough to sort things out when there are difficulties. We have enough integrity to care about what a brother or sister in Christ is doing. We are brave enough to engage with each other and, when met with indifference, pursue it. When we act in this way then God says, **there am I among them!**

One of the things that struck me as I re-read Romans was the command to **put on the armour of light**. Despite appearances, getting dressed is a deliberate act. You select what you are going to wear and you put it on. You can't get dressed by accident! So too, we cannot live like Christians by accident. You have to **put on the Lord Jesus Christ** as a conscious and deliberate choice and action.

The Bible is our resource, our rule book and our revitalisation – when we live by it we reverse evil and that means we LIVE!

If your faith is stronger, we rejoice together. If you have lapsed, we can work together. If you want to start all over again, God is waiting for you!