

Romans 7.15-25a & Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30 Integrity and Discipleship

July 2020

Romans 7.15-25a

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30

¹⁶ “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

¹⁷ “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest

²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Intro

Q1 Can you measure honesty and integrity?

A1 Social scientists try.

An experiment in 1970s set out to measure the co-relation between people’s stated values and their actual behaviour.

So as is often done to obscure what the research is really all about, a wide-ranging questionnaire was offered in which all sorts of scrambled questions were asked. Within that long questionnaire were questions about values held: Would you take something that did not belong to you? Is stealing wrong etc?

Then after the questionnaire the trap was laid. The person was then left alone in a typical waiting room with an office counter on which sat a glass jar full of coins and notes. In one corner rolled a hidden camera.

Whatever happened during that time was then matched to the answers people had given in their questionnaire.

Q2 What sort of result would you expect for the co-relation between stated values and observed behaviour? How consistent are people in that? How much integrity would you expect?

A2 The measured co-relation was 0.6.

That meant peoples’ stated values about honesty and stealing matched observed behaviours matched 60% of the time.

A 6/10 is a weak pass in school which perhaps describes the state of honesty in the experiment's test population 40 years ago. I think it feels about right for today.

Development

That example illustrates two things that are relevant to us and will feature in what I read from today's readings:

Firstly it shows the power of being tested.

- Testing creates a crisis that brings revelation.
 - - Passive realities are uncovered as in a Pandemic.
- Testing engages our actual level of integrity making it clear how inwardly aligned we are.

There is a line in the Lord's Prayer about this.¹

You will know it in various English translations as

- "Lead us not into temptation."
 - Which is not what God ever does!
- "Do not bring us to the test"
- "Save us from the time of trial"

It's very hard to translate from the Greek here as the key word, *πειρασμόν* can mean either,

- temptation,
- testing,
- trial,
- or even experiment.

I find myself agreeing with what in 1975 became the agreed ecumenical English language translation: "Save us from the time of trial".²

Why have I just dived into this word study?

Because the Lord's Prayer recognises the power and danger of testing.

When temptation looms and you are made to respond your actual integrity will be revealed.

The chemistry of your inner being will be laid bare.

This will show our character.

For that moment Jesus instructs us to pray:

- "Lord, save me from this danger".
- "Help me to be loyal and true to your call and what I profess as my allegiance and faith."

Secondly that social science experiment illustrates the category of integrity.

- Do we hold together and flow as a unity of purpose between words and actions?
- Is our face true to who we are and what we do?
- Are we an integrated 1.0 or more like 0.6?

¹ Matthew and Luke have differences in the Lord's Prayer – but they both agree on this line: *καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν.*

² <https://liturgy.co.nz/save-us-from-the-time-of-trial>

Text A

From what we heard in this morning's reading from Romans, St Paul lived at the front line of this place of testing. He writes as if his inner realities are before him all the time. Listen to these extracts:

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ...

The way he talks about this needs to be carefully read it can seem that his spirit and his body or 'flesh' are not aligned and working against each other.

This can suggest some sort of dualism which is how it was often taken. The truth is God made us a spiritual-physical being and not spiritual beings trapped in a physical body with fleshy appetites that undermine our higher spirituality.

What Paul is confessing is that he lives at the front line between living as the Spirit leads in his spirit and for some totally mysterious and undesired reason, the tendency to do just what he resolves not to do and fail to do what he wants to do.

Paul wants to be whole, pure, coherent and integrated in the life he lives from within himself. But he knows he is a work in progress.

In my reading his last line gives the answer

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

He lives with both the deep awareness of his brokenness with his need for healing and rescue and the powerful hope of knowing where that will come from. Jesus Christ his Lord, crucified, risen and ascended!

Q3 Why Jesus Christ?

A3 Because Jesus Christ was tested like no other both in the wilderness and on the cross where he was tested to destruction and he was raised immortal body and soul by The Father.

Jesus has transcended this earthly place of testing and offers all who come to him a participation in that new integrated existence.

In all this Paul traces the whole Gospel's account of the human problem and the saving solution in Jesus Christ.

Text B

Jesus was of course very also aware of the difficulties people have being integrated and aligned. In today's gospel reading he portrayed people in terms of a game children were known to play.

It involved giving a musical cue for others to respond to. Play funeral music and everyone act sad. Play wedding music and everyone act happy. Play dance music and everyone dance, and so on.

This is a comment on the level at which many people operate in compliance with forms. Churches are not immune!

The complaint is that Jesus does not comply with expectations. In fact, no one God sends or raises in that day is accepted because some excuse can be found.

- He is too this, or not enough that.
- He eats too much or not at all.
- He keeps the wrong company etc, etc.

For some reason in this I hear Martin Rae singing with his guitar: Man looks on the outside, God looks at the heart! Nice church people can be so shallow to the point of blind in registering what God may be bringing them.

It pays to remember that whatever comment we make about another or reasons we give for not accepting reveal more about the person speaking than the person they are assessing.

This hyper fussy critical distance as Jesus experienced it suggests an approach to faith that is impossible! Nothing lines up, nothing can be accepted, nothing makes the grade. This form of religiosity leaves everyone confused and without a way forward.

People lacking integrity pull down every voice that God raises. Again, churches are not immune from that!

You there this morning sitting on your sofa may need to consider:

- When was the last time you heard a note and received it as coming from God?
- When did you last respond to something brought by someone as coming from God without discounting or finding excuse?

Good News.

Jesus speaks to all this heaviness.

He knows the underlying struggles people face and even as Paul described.

To those caught up in the burden of it all and wanting to move on Jesus says:

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This is Jesus’ call to discipleship.

Carpenter Jesus may have made yokes and a good yoke was a comfortable one adjusted to the shoulders of the person ordering it.

His yoke would not have people flipping around in confusion from inner struggles and the derision of people who did not approve.

So what is the yoke of Jesus, what discipleship does he call us to as rest for our souls?

I suggest that the rest described is the rest of an aligned, integrated, illuminated and consistent inner life.

It’s the rest of peace and acceptance, authentic alignment and authenticity.

What does it involve? The yoke is a cross, an instrument of death.

The yoke Jesus offers involves repenting of what needs repenting of and believing or endorsing what needs to replace it. It is not that hard but does not happen by itself.

Repeat: its repenting of what needs repenting of and believing or endorsing what needs to replace it.

Jesus offers rest for our souls by joining with him in his journey of the cross.

Face every test and -

- Put the tempter to flight.
- Renounce the desire to sin
- Expose temptation and reject it.

That is Jesus' recipe for soul rest.

That is how the strife within our inner life is resolved - face the test and determine it.

The good news is that Jesus has done it and can take us through it to where he is.

Imagine if back in the honesty experiment some had said,

- "Get behind me Satan!" I will not take what is not mine to take.
or
- I choose to be holy and renounce greed.
or
- I live my life as a living sacrifice and not by exploitation.

In this strange pandemic season of testing with various strains and deprivations we have opportunity to exercise those Yoke disciplines as a Jesus follower.

Practice your baptism commitments to repent and believe, reject and submit, renounce and affirm.

This is the Yoke of Christ we may carry in every season.

This will bring rest to the weary.

Amen.