

6pm Choral Evensong 12 January 2025
Rom 6:1-11: Knowing Christian truths grounds Christian living: Christ's death and resurrection means life and liberty

There aren't many life-skills that you have to keep learning again and again. Take driving. You have a few lessons (or in my case, many lessons), you take your test (or in my case, a few tests), and off you go. Driving for life. Or take knitting. Learn the basics from a relative or a friend, or maybe YouTube. How to cast on, how to knit, how to purl, how to cast off. There you go. Master the basics, and you're on your way.

So why isn't it like that with being a Christian? How can it be that we can know everything that Paul says in our reading from his letter to the Romans (Romans 6:1-11), and yet we still feel that knowing all of this doesn't necessarily help us much, in our day to day lives? Why does being a Christian sometimes feel like such a struggle?

After all, if we've had any interaction at all with church, we're going to know, at least in theory, all of what Paul is saying here. We know, at least we know in theory, what Paul says in v6, that with Christ's death ***our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.***

And we know, at least we know in theory, what Paul says in v9 that ***Christ being raised from the dead ... death no longer has dominion over him.*** And we know, at least in theory, what Paul says in v4, that ***just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*** These are the Christian truths that ground Christian living. The knowledge that Christ's death and resurrection mean life and liberty for everybody who aligns themselves with Christ.

When Paul writes these Christian truths to Christians in Rome, Paul is writing to people who know these things as well as any of us know them. Paul says about the Christians in Rome, in Chapter 15, that he is confident that they ***are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.*** So Paul is writing to mature Christian believers. Then why is it that Paul knows that he has to keep repeating these basics of the Christian life, for these mature Christian believers? And why is it that we, who also know these things to be true, still find it difficult to hold onto these truths?

Two things, I think, make it hard to apply what we know, in theory, to what we live out in practice. For one thing, even when we think something is true, it can be hard to live as if it is true, and to put into practice what has to be taken on trust.

Paul seems to me to be acknowledging this, when he writes about what we *know* about Christ - about his death and his resurrection – needing to lead into what we *believe* about how we might live. Paul writes ***if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*** At the end of the passage read to us, he says ***so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*** It is not always easy to bring our thinking into line with the God-given reality, but this is what we need to do.

But the other point to remember is that we're not yet living in a world that is free of sin. Once we put our trust in Jesus' death for our sin having disposed of the **problem** of our sin, we ourselves have been freed from the **power** of sin. We are no longer **enslaved to sin**. But we're not free of the **presence** of sin. In fact, sin is all around us. We don't **want** to sin any more; we want to live a life that is without sin. We've been freed from the **desire** to sin, but we're still exposed to the **draw** of sin, to the allure of sin.

It is not just that we live in a world that is in thrall to rampant commercialism and to those who ruthlessly pursue power; a world where image matters more than character. The problem also lies with us, and in us. Because we're not yet perfect, not yet the finished product. We're not yet ready for heaven. We're a work in progress.

And whilst we're still a work in progress, we're going to struggle with sin. Not with the condemnation that we would otherwise face because of sin, because Christ's death has saved us from that. But we all struggle with the day-to-day reality of recognising our sin and working through its consequences. That bumpy, bringing us down to earth-y-ness that comes with realising that we've messed up ... again.

Not only *the things we have left undone which we ought to have done*, but also *the things we have done which we ought not to have done*. The things that we regret and are sorry for. We all struggle with the challenge and discomfort of knowing that, no matter how hard we try, we all need to keep on bringing these things before God, again and again. Not just on Sundays (although just on Sundays is better than never), but every day.

But we also have the joy and relief of knowing that we can keep on bringing these before God. And knowing that nothing that we do will ever make him love us any less. Being a Christian isn't easy. You and I know this, just as Paul knew it, and knew that the Christians in Rome knew it. But all of us – you, me, Paul, those Christians in Rome - we also know that Christ's death and resurrection has eternal and individual consequences for each and every one of us as God's children.

It is because of ***Christ, raised from the dead by the glory of the Father***, that **we have life and liberty**. It is Christ's death and resurrection that frees us to ***consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God***. It is **knowing these Christian truths that grounds our life in Christ**. Even if we are not yet free from the *presence* of sin, we can know ourselves free from the *power* of sin, and we can know that we are alive to God: living with Christ, for Christ, and in Christ.