

ROMANS 5:12-19
ON COURSE

This Communion service is all about Jesus! The focus of the whole service is on Jesus and what He has done for us and for the world. The service tells us that Jesus is the Saviour; the bread and wine speak to us about Jesus' sacrifice of Himself to save us, that He gave His life on the cross and God has achieved our salvation. Christ the wisdom of God and Christ the power of God: the right thing at the right time to achieve salvation for us. We come with open hands, empty hands to be filled by God, by faith, and to receive the gifts that God has planned to give us. All of that is what the communion service tells us; we depend on God for grace and that grace overflows to us through Jesus.

The piece we read from Romans 5 seems quite complicated at first reading (and at second and third readings too!) but at heart it is about two people and their impact on the world. This is about the impact that Adam and Jesus have had on the world; it is about two actions and the influence of these two actions on our lives and on our world. Paul reflects on these two people and what they did so that we may understand their impact on us and how faith in Jesus brings so much that is good into our lives. The first person is Adam, in the Bible the first man; the story in Genesis talks about Adam as being created by God, and with Eve being given the garden to look after, but there is a tree to avoid; Eve and then Adam chose to ignore God's warnings and eat of the tree of knowing good and evil and they were thrown out of the garden for disobeying God. The second person is Jesus and the action at heart of His story, He died on the cross.

Two people, two actions: one is an act of disobedience when Adam disobeyed God, and broke the law; in the other, Jesus obeyed God completely even to the bitter end! There are two motives: Adam selfishly wanted to go his own way, and wanted to be master of his own life; Jesus' action was one of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. There were two very different effects: Adam's action brought death into the world; it gave every human being a feeling of guilt; and brought condemnation from God. Jesus' action brought salvation to the world, brought forgiveness, brought a new sense of life and left us free, justified in the eyes of God!

Grace! This is the keyword; the key idea. Grace - "God's love to people who are not worthy of it" (Jas Philip) "*how much...*" (*Romans 5:15*) "*how much more...*" (*Romans 5:17b*) These are big words: "overflow", "abundant". God's grace is at the heart of what Jesus did; God loved a world where sin and death reigned; God changed the world by sending Jesus and by Jesus' death on the cross, so that grace reigns in the hearts and minds of believers. We are people who have been graced by God and into whose hearts God's grace overflows abundantly. It may not seem that way at times, but the communion service is here to remind us of what God has done for us in Jesus and how we are blessed by Jesus and His overflowing, abundant grace.

Where is your safe space? Where do you go to just be yourself? I've asked that question of people and some have said "on the football pitch" or "when I'm playing music" because these are places where they can simply be themselves and the things that worry them and make them anxious are put to one side for a while. Let me suggest that this is safe space for us: I don't necessarily mean being in the building but being in worship and sitting round the communion table. We don't need to pretend to be someone that we're not; don't need to put on a good face for God; we can simply open our hearts to Him and find grace to meet us and bless us as we are.

Peter Lely was painting a portrait of Oliver Cromwell in 1654, and he began to "improve" Cromwell by painting out some of the blemishes on his face. But Cromwell insisted that Lely paint him "warts and all"; so he did. Grace says that God loves us "warts and all"; this is a safe space to sit together round the communion table knowing that we belong here and that God's

grace overflows abundantly to us. None of us is perfect; none of us is able to love God completely or follow Jesus without being distracted. Most of us find faith a struggle at some time or another, for some particular personal reason. We all have good intentions as to what we will be or do and sometimes these good intentions fall by the wayside. We all have warts! But the good news is that God loves us as we are, “warts and all” and Jesus has died for us

This is a safe space as we focus on Jesus. The communion service is all about Jesus! Robert Bruce was minister of St Giles in the sixteenth century; he wrote a famous book about communion and in it he said “there are two givers in the sacrament: the minister gives the earthly thing; Christ Jesus the Mediator gives the heavenly thing.” (Bruce p.60) The bread and wine for us to touch, taste, and pass around; that’s what the minister gives. Grace for our hearts to strengthen our faith in Jesus, to help us follow Him, to sustain and support us when life is hard – that’s what Jesus gives to us. Grace focuses our minds on Jesus so that we believe and that believing find all kinds of good things from God. Jesus loves us; Jesus died on the cross, an act of self-sacrifice; Jesus brings forgiveness, salvation, hope, peace, and life to us. Thanks be to God for Jesus.