

**8.30am Trumpington and 10am HC St John's Sunday 9 August 2026**

**1 Kings 19:9-18, Romans 10:5-15, Matt 14:22-33 – *the good news of the righteousness that is accessible to all, achievable for all and available to all***

On a journey going from A to B, it can be a frustrating experience to have to take a diversion. But I wonder whether you've found that sometimes a detour off the original route has been a rewarding and a fruitful experience.

Take what happened in 1500, when Pedro Alvares Cabal and his fleet were following the African coastal route to Portugal. Pedro Alvares Cabal never intended to find himself and his fleet drifting quite so far west across the Atlantic. But that was how they ended up making landfall in what would become Brazil. A voyage that became a truly historic journey.

Chapters 9 to 11 of Paul's letter to the church in Rome are sometimes dismissed as a detour of a theological kind. In these chapters Paul grapples with whether God's choice of the Israelites as his chosen people had been a failed experiment and Paul answers the question of whether Israel can ever be saved. But in looking at the relationship between God and the Israelites, Paul has much to say which is of interest for both Jews *and* Gentiles (that is, those who are not Jews).

Paul explains how the Israelites misunderstood God's purpose in giving them the Law (the code, beginning with the Ten Commandments, by which the Israelites, newly-liberated from Egypt, might live as a free nation).

The Israelites knew Moses had said of the Law, in Leviticus 18:5, that ***the person who does these things will live by them***. And they took his words literally, thinking that following the Law was the *only* way they could be put right with God and forgiven their only-too-human self-centredness.

But in Deuteronomy chapter 30, Moses reminded the Israelites that the essence of the Law was ***to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might***. And in v11, Moses told the Israelites that putting their trust in God was neither too hard for them, nor was it too far away, for as Moses said in v14, ***the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart***.

Moses was saying that whenever the Israelites felt that living in accordance with the Law was beyond them; whenever they felt that no matter how hard they tried, the perfect life was always out of reach; that was the time to remember God's love and faithfulness to them and to recall that God would always be with them.

Paul quotes Moses telling the Israelites they don't have to ask ***Who will ascend into heaven*** to bring down heaven's holiness; but Paul is reminding us that it is Christ who came down to us from heaven. And Paul quotes Moses telling the Israelites not to be discouraged because God's holiness is beyond them (or as Moses puts it, ***on the other side of the sea from us***); but Paul is reminding us that it was God who reached down ***into the abyss*** and in raising Christ from the dead defeated the power of sin and death.

The righteousness by faith, that comes from Christ, isn't remote. Nor is it entirely unreachable, except for a favoured few. The righteousness that comes from faith in Christ is not about being born into the twelve tribes of Israel, or learning the Law, or having the right credentials to be counted in a religious elite. On the contrary, the righteousness that comes from faith has nothing to do with who you are, or what you do.

This is righteousness that is equally **accessible to everybody**.

And it is righteousness that is equally **achievable for everybody**.

It isn't achieved by living an impeccably moral life or by signing up to the causes that are deemed to be morally correct, because Christ already came down to us from heaven, so that he might take us back with him to heaven. Nor is righteousness from faith only ever achieved after plumbing the depths of despair, or by trying to out-do Jesus and everybody else in what you are willing to give up.

The righteousness that comes from faith doesn't depend on who you are, or on what you do, but on what you believe and on who you trust. You will know the righteousness that comes from faith when you can ***confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead***.

Trusting in Jesus means recognising that God alone could raise Jesus from the dead. And living by faith in Jesus means not just learning a theory about who has the power to make and un-make the world and our lives, but re-aligning our allegiances and our priorities and putting Jesus first. Taking hold of the righteousness of faith involves both heart and mouth. Speaking our faith out loud helps us to claim it for ourselves. As Paul says, ***one believes with the heart and is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and is saved.***

Last week in Dublin, on tour with Homerton College's Charter Choir, I discovered the benefits of Dublin's red bikes scheme. It was easy enough to download the app and sign up, and the red bikes were easy to locate. But getting hold of an actual bike didn't just require me to swipe right on my phone. Releasing a bike also needed me to press a button on the bike-rack to unlock the bike. Swiping on the phone had activated the bike rack's unlocking mechanism, but the bike would only be mine to take away if I engaged with the final part of the process and pressed the button that would release the bike.

And it's the same with engaging with Jesus. Whenever we talk about having put our trust in Jesus; whenever we claim our faith in Christ as our own; then we are engaging with God in what he has done for us through Jesus. We are participating in what the Father and the Son have done through the cross and in the resurrection, releasing us from our sin and offering us a new life with Christ. The Father and the Son have already done what we could never do for ourselves. All we have to do is to believe it and to say it. It really is that easy, and it is equally **achievable for everybody**, irrespective of who you are, or what you've done.

It is also **available to everybody**, regardless of age, or background, or temperament.

The diversity of humankind is a blessing from God and is an essential part of what makes us who we are, but Paul tells us that the very real distinctions between us are irrelevant to our faith. So it doesn't matter what country you come from, what language you speak, or what your parents believed. As Paul

says, after quoting from Isaiah, ***the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.*** And as was promised by the prophet Joel: ***everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*** Our churches need to be places where we practice acceptance of everybody, welcoming everybody because we are all of us equally undeserving of God's mercy and yet are all of us equally loved by God.

**Righteousness that is equally accessible to all, equally achievable for all, and equally available to all...**

**Truly this is good news.**