

The Revd Canon John Roff

Date: 3rd Sept 2023
Sunday: Trinity 13
Place: Old Royal Naval College Chapel
Service: Choral Evensong
Reading: Romans 12. 9 - end
Theme: Reset

Hermione my wife and I have great admiration for Robert as he not only copes with the treatment for his illness, but also continues to wonderfully care for us all as the chapel congregation. Like all of you we long for the time when he is fully restored to health and strength.

And since our move from Lancaster last Easter we are grateful to be included as members of the congregation here. Thank you.

I'm keen to learn how to take better care of the earth's resources and not to be profligate. In our house everything like the heating is zoned, there are solar panels and batteries that charge the electric car, a water meter and various attachments to reduce the amount of water one might unthinkingly use. But there's one area where I fail. I've tried hard to rectify it but I need another attempt. Woefully, all too frequently, I leave my computer on overnight. Now I know this doesn't use a huge amount of electricity but if only we all... But importantly there is another side effect which I lose out by leaving the computer on permanently. If I understand it correctly when you switch the computer back on it reboots, resets, updates itself with the latest security

software. It is this resetting that I miss out on, and which one day might render my computer pretty impotent.

I have in mind that Paul was a great re-setter. I'm not sure that he's a kind of guy I would have liked to have gone for a drink with, but there is no denying his charismatic nature and his great strategic thinking. His writings are generally years before the gospels so formative for the Christian church. He came to a Christian community with huge experience of the Jewish hierarchy. He knew that he must take his Christian insights to the heart of the Jewish community first, so travelling to Jerusalem. But I think he knew too that that would be a pretty thankless task. He had encountered rigidity, convention, mindless observance, even self-seeking corruption, and I don't think he rated his chances of great success amongst his former friends and colleagues.

So on from Jerusalem, the centre of his Jewish origins, to Rome – the centre of the Empire in which they were all contained. It's the letter to the Roman that has our second lesson. If he can get a significant foothold established in the Roman Empire then growth of the Christian church looks very possible, and he's prepared to give himself - even after the example of his Lord's death - to achieve such a thing.

You can see that with courage and determination and prayer he is resetting things in the service of his Lord and Master, who since his conversion has provided Paul with life giving meaning and purpose.

But in addition to this strategic focus of geographic centres he has a second mind blowing strategy. Charismatic though he is he knows he would fall far short if he was the prime mover. No, his vision for growth is to be undertaken by numerous small congregations throughout the world. They are the influencers, they are the interpreters, they are the carers, they are the recruiters. He writes to them, he visits them, he nurtures them – small congregations, all over the world, just like ours here at the old Royal Naval College in Greenwich.

The vital thing that Paul was concerned about was that when outsiders or friends or enquirers looked at these small communities they saw something both distinctive and very attractive. When people were so down they had nothing left they would find a home in such communities. When the Christian community was attacked, it would respond only with compassion and generosity. In such a way true discipleship of Jesus Christ, son of God, would be uncovered and followed by an increasing number of new disciples.

Now, first week of September. It signals a new style of weather, academic terms, not a bank holiday in sight but different sorts of holidays for the lucky free'. It may have some element that lend itself to starting something new or achieving a new objective. You may be going to join a new organisation, learn a new discipline, or master the art of filo pastry. You could consider September is naturally a time to reset.

So whatever else you've got on in this coming week, what about grasping the letter to the Romans chapter 12? Was Paul right to recruit you, so that gently but persistently, in any way you can, you help form loyal followers of Jesus? Suppose you spend a little time thinking of your neighbours – what do they see when you come to worship? Suppose you spend a little time thinking of someone who is really down on their resources at the moment – what might they receive from us in a selfless, generous way. Suppose you encounter an acquaintance who is an enquirer – is it obvious that your faith leads you often to explore the God-given nature of things in our world? And possibly most importantly - how can you make our worshipping community seem still more attractive to anyone who comes, who comes here purposely or by casual chance?

This is a week of our resetting along the lines to some of the ideas Paul wrote down in the letter to the Romans. We can use them to banish habit and self-interest and banish the kind of religion that cuts no ice.

Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope ...and to the one great Lord our God be all might, majesty, dominion and power now and for ever. Amen.