

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Monday July 17th: Some Notes

Isaiah 55: 10-13: The background to what Isaiah is saying was not at all encouraging; but Isaiah shouts his hope in the Lord – for a future dominated by God’s grace, and expressed in universal joy. You will recognise the music! In the end, the truth is victory, not defeat. God is, of course, rather more patient than most of us are; and, for all of us, there are times when it seems almost indecent, as well as darned difficult, to be cheerfully optimistic. Please note that the harvest imagery implies work as well as fruition: the harvest ain’t going to gather itself in!

Psalms 65: 8-13: The third part of a three-part psalm, or maybe three psalms joined together. Maybe celebrating Assyrian withdrawal from Jerusalem. A lovely picture of creation, and not just human-kind, celebrating.

Romans 8:1-11: It’s too simple to take this as simply a sex dragging us down warning, though the monk trying to meditate and finding himself thinking about the young lady he noticed in the street could be relevant. As could be (relevant) the Sunday worshipper who thought it right to fast before Communion, but found stomach rumbling during the sermon. Paul uses “Flesh” and “spirit” in different ways, but the heart of it is the contrast between humanity with and without God. God can be there in the sex and in the meal and in the fellowship, transforming them. Or we can shut God out and make a mess of our lives and our world.

Matthew 11: 1-9, 18-23: Looks very much like Jesus sitting, maybe in a boat, pointing out to the crowd a parable in action visible to them on the hillside. Two ways of sowing seed: man throwing handfuls from a bag he was carrying, or donkey walking up and down the field carrying on its back a sack with a hole in it. (Yes, really!) Fields were strips with hardened public pathways between them. Stony ground was not ground full of stones, but shallow soil over limestone. Think less of throwing seed into brambles etc, than of ground roughly cleared, but with the bramble/weed roots still there – and growing more successfully than the grain. (If you do much walking in the countryside, this parable will ring very true.)

KIV: The disciples had seen Jesus (greatest of preachers) preaching to deaf ears, or at any rate preaching without apparently changing very much.

A William Barclay story to remember: An old man in the congregation died. He had long out-lived his peers. Sadly, apart from the Minister there was only two other mourners. One a member of the congregation who felt obliged to turn out. The other was a stranger in a military coat. As they left the graveyard together, the stranger joined the local man, and his coat opened to show the insignia of a brigadier. He explained his presence: our dead friend was my Sunday School teacher. I was a dreadful boy. He saw potential in me, and made me change my ways. I owe him a lot.