

# Sermon for Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2024, St Mary's Church, North Marston

Trinity 6

(With young people in mind)

By David Heffer



*The Apostle Paul by Rembrandt van Rijn*

## Bible Reading

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

*<sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – <sup>4</sup>was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. <sup>5</sup>I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, <sup>7</sup>or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

## Sermon

I want to remind you of the exploits of a man called Saul. He was not a very pleasant man and he hated the people called Christians because he thought they spoke so excitedly about Jesus. He was against what he thought was a new religion. So, one day he set out to put all the Christians he could find in prison to stop them telling people about Jesus. But while he was travelling to a town called Damascus a very strange thing happened. A very bright light shone on him, so bright he fell from his horse and he became blind. But what happened next came as a great surprise. He heard a voice asking him why he was so angry with the people who loved Jesus and he suddenly realised that what he thought was wrong, was the very thing that he needed to make his life complete. Fortunately a very kind man called Ananias bravely made friends with Saul and Saul became a Christian and changed his name to Paul.

Now Paul became a great preacher and risked his life telling people about Jesus and his love for everyone. Now in our Bible reading you may have noticed that Paul suffered from some kind of illness he called it his "Thorn in the flesh" which does sound rather nasty but it was obviously something that troubled him all through his life and he prayed to God to take

it away but it didn't happen. Despite this problem Paul didn't let it stop him doing God's work and he got into all sorts of scrapes in order to spread the gospel.

Now this got me thinking about brave people who do all sorts of good deeds despite having to carry some sort of disability or burden. I'm sure you too can think of people like Captain Tom who, despite his age trudged up and down to raise money for the NHS or people who despite their own poverty work their socks off for their community, or those who despite the limitations of extreme youth or old age are determined to make life better for those around them. I had a very saintly Brother-in-law he was the kindest person and while in his wheelchair at a station was much frustrated by not being able to help an old lady with her luggage and had to be restrained from getting up and giving her assistance.

I make a point of recording Songs of Praise and apart from enjoying the singing I particularly enjoy the cameos of people who have suffered in some way yet witness to their faith by bravely serving others and telling of God's love for them. What a lot they have to offer in their own particular way but it is so easy in this big noisy world to ignore their contribution.

In our other reading Jesus came into the synagogue to teach and preach, so much he had to give so much love and challenge, but people were blinded by their own small mindedness that they could only see the carpenter's son, as the neighbour's son next door. and not the personification of love, light and knowledge. It is very easily done isn't it I find it difficult to believe that someone whose nappies I once changed now gets me out of all sorts of trouble with my computer and advises me on legal matters! Isn't it difficult to allow other people to be what they are without commenting or wanting to modify their behaviour. When Jesus was talking and walking with his disciples, Peter seeing John, said to Jesus "What about this man?" To which Jesus replied in effect "That has nothing to do with you" A commentator points out that while Peter became a shepherd of Christ's flock, John was to be a witness to the things that Jesus had done and said, each to their own. Each of us has God given skills and talents some most unexpected. A lad I taught years ago was shall we say academically challenged but put him on the back of a horse and he was brilliant; and when we put on plays at the end of term, well I only wish we had him in MADS now!

Paul claimed that his "Thorn in the flesh" kept him grounded and free from pride, I'm sure it did. Today we have his wonderful letters in the New Testament to advise, challenge and comfort.

May we whatever life throws at us turn that cross coinage to pure gold by our efforts for the Kingdom's sake. Amen