

Romans 5:12-21

Psalm 116

Matthew 9:35-10:8

And death shall have no dominion

In a sentence:

In a world of death-dealing dominions, the gospel offers the life-giving lordship of Jesus

How Much More

There's a lot going on in our reading from Romans this morning! I've tried to give some indication of the dynamics of Paul's argument with the colourful version of the text on the pew sheets, to make more evident a few of the directions taken in the text.

Of those various connections and emphases, I'd like us to consider together this morning is the *Much* and the *More* and the *Surely*, which pop up several times throughout the text. If something has gone wrong in us, Paul says, Much More Surely has God brought about something good and remedying in Christ. *How Much More* the gospel gift is, over the fruit of human brokenness. Christians, in Paul's view, are How Much More people – are a people of God's excess.

But what does that mean for the contemporary experience of the church in this society, today? In particular, what does it mean for us as a congregation about to move to a new place. Are we moving into a space and a being which is More, or Less?

More, or Less?

The Less-ness is obvious. This congregation is what remains of a community which built a 900 seater church (UMC), and of another community on the other side of North Melbourne, and of another community which worshipped in Parkville, and of numerous other church communities which have long since closed. The Less in all this is unambiguous. And we move now to another site, Less the history and the grandeur of the ecclesial spaces which have been enjoyed in this place for over 150 years.

At the same time, after 12 or 13 years of being squashed into this hall, there is a sense in which we are moving to a More, given the space, the aesthetics, and the clean and accessible toilet facilities we expect to enjoy the CTM!

Yet we also know the risk. What is More at the CTM might just be the burning brighter of a lamp just before it goes out. This would not be a real More but the particular way in which the Less finally arrives.

If Christians are a How Much More people, in what way is this so under these circumstances and given the admittedly very possible Less outcome? For all our careful planning and attention to refining the memorandum of understanding, the hiring agreement, and property sale proceeds, we cannot turn our face from the possibility of death. And there are no communities around which are obviously How Much More than our own: it is change and decay in all around, we see. The Less of death's dominion seems to be spreading to swallow up the How Much More people.

Adam and Christ

Yet St Paul is across this. His argument in our passage today looks, at first glance, to be somewhat abstract and highfalutin in its theological twists and turns. But what he is basically doing here is speaking about our existence through two related but contrasting conceptualities, marked by Adam and Christ.

These two ways of speaking about being human are like the “overwhelmings” our study groups have been considering over the last few weeks, as we have read our way through David Ford’s *The shape of living*. Paul might well have written in terms of “overwhelmings”, but his expression is “dominion”. To be in Adam or in Christ is to be subject to a comprehensive power, to one kind of lordship or another. But these dominions are not symmetrical; what they offer is not equal and opposite.

Adam stands for death and decay, and we certainly see a lot of Adam around us. Paul saw this too; the motivation for his letters to his little congregations around Asia Minor was precisely the experience of change and decay. But Paul’s gospel is of a God who raises the dead and calls into being what does not yet exist. This is the Much More in what we have heard from him this morning. Yet the Much More is not something *added* on top of what we already have. It’s not the promise of compensation or reward after an experience of So Much Less than we hoped for. For this reason, the resurrection of Jesus has to be understood not as a mere reversal or undoing of all the Much Less which went before, particularly the crucifixion. Instead, the resurrection shines a light on the quality of the life of Jesus despite appearances in the opposition he met and the apparent judgement of the cross.

The Much More, then, is not a life to come; it takes place in this life. It was the life of Jesus before the crucifixion and *even in* the crucifixion. Jesus is never the Less but is always the How Much More. His life and the death is a denial of death’s dominion: the denial that life must ultimately be subject to the darkness of death’s shadow.

Living well, dying well

The Much More, then, is not a *quantity*. It is not something extra added at the end to balance the scales. The Much More is a *quality*. The question is not how long our lives are and, therefore, whether there is a More to come for anyone one of us or for the congregation in our new location. The question is whether, in whatever time that we have, we are slaves or free. This is the difference between Adam and Christ. It is the art of dying well because I have lived well. In this sense, there is for each of us the possibility of a How Much More.

Such a life is lived with death already behind it, rather than death before it. This is a strange way to put it because we are yet to die biological death, but the language here must be odd because the thought the gospel invites us to think cannot quite be grasped.

Of course, we will still die, and we will grieve our dead. But scandalously – and it is scandalous, in view of the pain death brings – it is *almost* as if for Paul death were a state of mind, and that the gospel calls for a *change* of mind – the meaning of the word ‘repent’. This repentance is not the denial of death but the refusal to live under death’s shadow. This a question of dominion: who is Dominus, who is Lord? Not death. Christ.

In the biblical story, there stands between Adam and Christ, between slavery and freedom, Abraham, about whom we had a bit to say last week. We are Abraham invited to turn from Adam’s death to Christ’s life. Go to the land that I will show you, says God – even Christ himself.

This is easier than it seems. We saw last week that all Abraham and Sarah had to do was live in a strange land, have a child, and tell him a story. And the effect of their doing that is that we're here today thinking about Adam, Abraham, and Christ, about life between slavery and freedom.

And now we are going to a strange land, and there goes with us a God of How Much More. All we need to do is have a child and tell her the story.

If this How Much More God is faithful, which is the true heart of our question about God, our work will have been done if we *do* go,
and bear,
and tell.

From there, the How Much More of God will take care of itself.
