

**July 28, 2024 (Trinity 9) – Revd Wim Kuiper**  
**Anglican Church Arnhem & Nijmegen**

I don't know what you think of this Summer. In my opinion it has not been overwhelming in this part of Europe. Warm and sunny spells are short lived and on many days there have been showers. The weather is one could say rather inconsistent. There's a nice Dutch saying to indicate this kind of weather. 'Het is halen en brengen.' Now, as with many sayings you cannot easily translate them into another language. 'Halen' means 'to fetch something' or 'to pick someone up' and brengen is of course 'to bring'. But the two put together in this Dutch saying express an ongoing change of circumstances, a moving up and down, backwards and forwards, simply a situation characterised by inconsistency. And it is this same inconsistency which can be found in the human character of even the most towering figures in the Bible. Think of Moses and his tempers or of St Peter's denial of the Lord. And in today's reading of King David giving in to his temptation. As with the weather, so it is with human beings, even with great prophets, kings and those we call saints. 'Halen en brengen', up and down, inconsistency. How does God look at this, what is his reaction to it? Today's Psalm gives us an ever bleaker picture of mankind. We hear how 'God is looking down on us, his children of earth, looking for someone who is wise and seeks after God'. But everyone seems to have turned back, there is none that does good, not one.' We may understand this thought when we imagine ourselves, for instance being alongside those who are in very grim circumstances in places such as Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan or Haiti. But even in those places there are still people who try to alleviate the suffering of others, who act as peace makers and care for the poor and needy. The Bible as a whole is realistic about the human condition and always stresses God's merciful and forgiving reaction, though not without judgement. The picture is not as black as it has been painted, for instance in the most orthodox protestant pockets of the church here in this country. There is a balance to be struck in thinking about our shortcomings and at the same time staying hopeful about our God given abilities to do good. We are called to stay humble and realistic about ourselves, but should never feel incapable of serving the Lord's creation in whatever way and thereby pleasing our Creator. For us as Christians there is every reason to be extra hopeful, even optimistic about making some more progress along the way. King David knew that what he did was wrong already because of his conscience. A God given faculty to every human being, regardless of their beliefs and world views. He also knew it because of the Law that was given to the people of Israel. Moreover he had an excellent prophet around him, called Nathan, who was bold enough to speak truth to power, as we will read next Sunday (but you will probably know how the story goes).

But we are living in a time when God has given us so much more than our conscience, the Law and the prophets, to enable and encourage us to know him better and therefore to grow in doing his will. We just need to pick it up, to fetch it, or perhaps better said, to receive it out of his hands. And as we are willing to do so, our offer, what we will be able to bring, is changing for the better. Even though it will still never be perfect. Indeed: halen en brengen.

St Paul in today's reading from his letter to the Ephesians gives us a magnificent expression of what it is that we as Christians can continue to receive out of God's hands on a daily basis. It is the kind of passage that is worthwhile to read and reread, to meditate upon in silent prayer or during a walk through nature. It is the kind of passage that is often given to retreatants who are on a silent retreat, to take through the day. St Paul talks about a strengthening of our inner being through his Spirit. He talks about how Christ may dwell in our hearts. How we may be more and more rooted and grounded in love. And how we might attain more and more understanding of the breath and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. He speaks about a power at work within us, which is able to accomplish so much more than we can ask or imagine.

These are truly powerful and healing words that our souls need to hear. Especially when we are aware of our own brokenness and inconsistency. We can always go back to them, we should indeed. It is so amazing that God in Jesus has reached out to mankind in a completely new and decisive way. Opening a road for us to change more deeply than ever before. Offering to us this greatest example of a human being without any sin, to turn to if we want to know how to live a life in all its fullness. To live in the way that it's meant by our loving Creator. Living not only with the law and prophets on our side, but with his Spirit actively working within us.

This is something we can experience in very deep way when we receive Christ here in church at the Eucharist. Saying that we are not worthy to receive him puts us in the right place, increasing our longing for him and the healing he has to offer us. And so we are receiving and bearing this great treasure in our earthen vessels, as St Paul puts it elsewhere (2Cor4:7). Knowing that the excellence of this power may be of God and not of us. So it is about 'halen en brengen' in this different sense of receiving and giving. Opening ourselves up to receive. To be surprised by what may be given to us and also to be surprised by what we may be able to give as a consequence. Amen