

Thought for the Day 22nd April - John Reed

Read Romans 3:9-27

As you know, I love a good joke.

I don't claim to *tell* a good joke, but I do like one!

I suspect I'm not alone in enjoying humour, and thinking I have a great sense of humour, only to discover that in the eyes of others I'm really not that funny!

I was reading a news article from 2014 yesterday (the things we do when we're stuck in home isolation!). It was in *The Guardian* (not the Australian one, which it turns out is Malcolm Turnbull's baby, but the "proper" British one), and it was an article by Stephen Moss on comedy [<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/19/tim-vine-your-favourite-joke-hoover-edinburgh-festival>]. Moss reported that at the Edinburgh festival, Tim Vine had won the coveted prize for the funniest joke. The joke was ... wait for it ... "I've decided to sell my Hoover ... well, it was just collecting dust." Get it? Get it? (for those who don't, Hoover is a brand of vacuum cleaner, and what do vacuum cleaners do?)

Whether or not you love that joke, it's a comment that came at the end of the article that got me thinking. You see, Moss goes on to mention another couple of the jokes that made the top-ten list, with which he didn't seem to be particularly impressed, before saying: "The rest of the top 10 was truly terrible." He then concludes: "Anyway, we know you can do better. So cue lights, let's have some hush from audience ... the stage is yours ... tell us your favourite joke."

How easy is that! To do better than the professional comedians who made the top 10 list at as prestigious festival!

Well, actually, maybe not that easy ...

Have you ever found yourself thinking "I could do better than that"? Whether it be the footballer who makes a howling error that loses the game, or the politician who got into government on the back of strange preference deals and then proceeds to embarrass us all, the world is full of people that you and I could do better than. I've seen it happen often enough in churches too: "That warden/youth minister/assistant minister/senior minister/bishop/Archbishop just hasn't got what it takes/isn't doing their job the way I would do it ... I could do better!" I've seen (and just to be clear, I'm not talking about St John's here) people hounded out of their position in the church by those who were sure they knew better/could do better. The sad irony is that, given their chance, the usurpers usually haven't done better at all. Often worse.

You see, it's easy to be an armchair expert. To know how things should be done. To criticise those who are giving it their best shot in a flawed way. But the harsh reality is, we're not necessarily any better. Because we're all flawed.

We all sin and "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Paul wrote those words to those who felt they could be justified by their law-keeping and looked down on those that didn't keep the law. And his message is a sobering one: don't think so highly of yourself (and so badly of other people)! *Nobody* is good enough. Sure, those other people have failed to please God by keeping the law – but so have you! Look back at verse 19: “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, *so that every mouth may be stopped ...*” Your attempts to keep the law don't justify you, or make you righteous in God's sight – all they do is highlight your failure.

But the good news is, you don't have to rely on your ability to do better than everyone else. There is salvation to be found from outside yourself. Because, despite our failings, we are “justified by his [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

The Christian life is not about arrogantly saying: “I'm better than everyone else.” It's about humbly recognising our own brokenness and failure, and accepting and rejoicing in the grace of God made available to us in Jesus.