



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 6 November 2022 – 3 before Advent
Readings: 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-end & St Luke 20: 27-38
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Stepping back from the coalface

The two Bible readings put me in mind of an old truism that so often in life we take too much for granted. To illustrate my point, I will take you on a slight detour via the Forest Stores. Three weeks ago, over-confident that I would find exactly what I wanted on the usual shop shelf, I was left staring glumly at an empty space and left the shop without. Later that day, my post-holiday virus hit me putting matters into perspective. The absence of simple routine sharpened my focus on more important matters than the mere lack of my favourite flavour of Rountree's jelly! The point of telling you that is in the Bible readings both the Thessalonians and the Sadducees are fretting over theological imponderables and not focusing on the more important matter of strengthening faith with hope, love, joy and peace leading to life-giving eternity. Let's consider Thessalonians first. The matter that's making them anxious may seem obscure to us and Paul's way of addressing it, perhaps, unclear, but bear with me. The Thessalonians were fretting about Christ's Second Coming, having misinterpreted a message in one of Paul's previous letters. They had reached the point of hysteria wondering if in fact they had missed the second coming altogether and, been left behind. Paul, effectively says, "Keep calm dears, yes, it will happen but, in God's time". Meanwhile, with the earthly life that is left to them they should be concentrating on strengthening their faith leading to life-giving eternity. How? I'll address that by turning to the Gospel.

Seeing the bigger picture

One of the many facets of doctrine that divided the Pharisees and Sadducees causing endless, futile, heated debate was the resurrection to eternal life. The former did believe in it but the latter did not. In the gospel, to support their own ideology, the Sadducees challenge Jesus with their over-engineered, legalistic illustration about a woman ultimately married to seven brothers on the demise of the previous ones. Jesus, as ever, crystallises the important issue putting it authoritatively. In a few simple words he strips out the farce destroying their argument. He changes the focus from ideological conundrums to the more important matter of attaining a place in heaven, for resurrection life transcends all earthly matters. How do we make sense of this issue living in an era two millennia after Christ's ascension to heaven, when the Second Coming may seem to be a distant prospect and our own earlier demise more likely? We do as Christ urges, by strengthening our faith in the here and now, to build confidence and hope of heavenly life, whether we receive that through death or being gathered at the Second Coming. The recessionary hymn encapsulates the source of our confidence saying, 'In Christ alone, my hope is found, he is my light, my

strength, my song, this Cornerstone, this solid Ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.'

To go forward boldly

With our faith thus underpinned, let's satisfy our curiosity, as to what we may expect in heaven. There's no point in stewing over what we don't know, so let's focus on what we do know. The word heaven means 'being with God' and, we know a lot about him: God is love; God is good God is just; God is true; God is Holy, in other words, divinely righteous which sets him apart from the joyless mess we make of the world he created for us. In resurrection life, those who believe Christ is our salvation join God in a far bigger world of light and life in all its joyful fulness. Importantly, we do not make that journey alone if, as Jesus remarks, we are faithful members of the children of the resurrection. It is Christ who leads us from the company of earthly living to the place of loving community, where we will be gathered with all those beloved souls who have gone before. How do we hold this promise in our hearts to give us peace in daily living? We could think of it this way: at this time of year when the days grow shorter and we reach for the light switch much earlier in the day, let's think of heaven as the place where there is no need of light switches. The light of the love of God banishes all darkness. So, whether it is theological conundrums or, the simplest lack of a favourite product, Christ calls us to rise above these earthly wants and challenges and, instead, be confident in his provision for our eternal home. Amen.