

Trinity 8 [Proper 14 (C)]

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on Sunday 11 August 2019

Readings: Genesis 15.1-6 and Luke 12.32-40

Today's gospel shows that the values of the Kingdom of Heaven are very different from the values of the world. Jesus offers a challenge to human nature. The truth is that all the material possessions that people spend their lives accumulating are worthless *unless* we have had the opportunity to use them wisely and enjoy the pleasure of those to whom we give and with whom we share them. That was very much the message of last week's gospel reading, about the rich farmer building bigger barns for his harvest.

Jesus urges his followers to set their hearts on treasure that will last for ever, and never lose its value. The love of God, his promises to us, our forgiveness and our salvation - these are, quite literally, priceless. Eternal life cannot be bought by us, nor can we pay to get into heaven. Salvation, the Kingdom, Jesus reassures us, is God's free gift; it is the Father's generous gift to us, given, not because we have earned it or deserve it, but because God loves us. He has prepared a place for those who put their trust in him, and it is faith which will open the door - not any good deeds of ours, and certainly not our money.

Money itself is not evil. It is how, in every human society that has moved beyond exchange and barter, we buy what we need. It can be used to do good. Jesus urged people to sell their possessions and give to the poor, so he was hardly suggesting that we give something evil to those in need. Nor was he saying that we should render ourselves totally destitute and thus in need of alms ourselves. What Jesus is calling for is generosity, investment, and a just distribution of wealth, so that all may eat, all may have shelter, all may enjoy access to health care and education, and to employment which gives a sense of dignity and human worth. We may not usually think that the Guernsey Tax Office is God's agent, but our taxes are one way in which this distribution of wealth, for the common good, is achieved. Another, of course, is our giving to our church and to charities, for work here and abroad. Wise investment can also encourage human flourishing.

Money is not the problem. *It is love of money for its own sake that is the root of evil.* We get things out of proportion if we depend excessively on money, instead of the love of God. We are destined for disappointment on a cosmic scale if we put our trust in money, rather than in God's justice and mercy.

Jesus tells a story about a robber, a thief who broke in while the householder was unprepared. It's easy to miss just how shocking this mini-

parable is: the Son of Man is compared to a thief! And yet, if a thief is someone who robs us of valuable possessions, then the analogy is appropriate. When the Son of Man comes, or when we die and meet our Maker, all those material possessions are stripped from us, and we are totally dependent on the goodness of God.

Is preparing for this something we can safely put off until tomorrow? It is easy to tell ourselves that there is plenty of time, that we'll get round to it eventually: one day we'll make that decision to put God and his values at the centre of our lives, but not just yet. Jesus bids us think again, as he did in last week's gospel reading. We never know when we will be called to account.

'You also must be ready,' Jesus tells us. The choice is ours, but we are encouraged make it now, to realise that we live not just for ourselves but for others and for God. Then whatever is given to us in this world (our money, our time, our talents) will not be treasured just for its own sake, but used generously and creatively for the good of others and to allow the flourishing of God's church and people. Thus can we show that our trust is in God alone, who has promised us unfailing treasure in heaven: eternal life in his loving presence.

Our faith can be strengthened when we see it in the context of the development of the relationship between God and his people we see in the Bible and in the outworking of the life of the Church across the ages. It is our active and informed response to the bigger story of God's ways in the world, nurtured every time we recognise signs of God's activities – the signs confirming that we are on the right path. And as the Gospel describes, we express our faith by being dressed for action, waiting to respond – even at the most inconvenient times.

It may be unglamorous. But that is faithful persistence.