



Sunday, 14 October – Trinity 20
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Hebrews 4:12-end, Gospel St Mark 10: 17-31
Focusing on priorities
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

In our Team Church Harvest Festival sermon, we gave thanks to God for his goodness. Today's readings are the sequel, you could say, it's payback time! A chance for us to offer reciprocity to God.

We all have our own individual personalities, so what might be the right way for one person to serve God may not work for another. Irrespective, the readings show that a committed, loving response from each of us is right. Scriptural prods can be helpful in energising an effective response and today's Epistle does exactly that in a way that really focuses the mind. Here's what I mean: it informs that God's Son, the living Word, is razor sharp and will pierce our consciences to reveal our true intentions. Nothing will be hidden from his gaze and, for our thoughts and actions, we will need to give an account.

We could be totally unnerved by this but thankfully the Epistle gives us the antidote to anxiety. It reminds us that God's Son understands our weaknesses because when he took on our human flesh he was subject to the same temptations that we face and the same feelings of anger and despair. Jesus, as we know, did not succumb to them but, relied on prayer to fight sin and sorrow and triumphed. And prayer is the key for us too, as it unlocks faith and salvation. To precis what I've said so far, belief in Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension gives access to his bridge of grace, from heaven to earth, through which God's mercy flows. In times of physical need and spiritual challenge God is always more willing to offer his help than we ever remember to ask for it.

Knowing who to ask for help is vital, so let's turn to the Gospel where we find the rich man doing just that, seeking Jesus. He's clearly a serious-minded individual who has studied the law and applied it but he feels that there's something lacking as he's anxious that he will not inherit eternal life. Jesus cross-checks the man's adherence to Godly living listing the commandments. The man effectively replies "Been there, done that and got the proverbial Tee-shirt." Jesus, however, probes further saying, "Sell all you have and give it to the poor." The man's shocked and departs dejected for he was very rich and he loved his valuables dearly. He'd got his priorities back to front. He had forgotten that all gifts come from God and of God's own, in gratitude, we should offer them back to him for use in his service.

We may not be as rich as that man - don't worry, I'll not ask for your bank statements to prove it! - but, in putting the spotlight on the rich man has taken focus off us and how we serve God. And, we do, don't we? We give to charity and, perhaps we have recently reviewed our giving to the ministry of the church. But money isn't the only

thing on which we can place a value. We give of our time to the church in various ways. And, in the wider community, I'm sure that we all keep an eye out for our family and acquaintances bringing them to church, maybe driving them to doctors' appointments or baking a cake just to cheer them up. That's all good. Now, let's get back to the Gospel.

Peter and the other disciples' comments indicate that they have mistaken priorities too. For them, it's not the acquisition of valuables that's clouding their judgement, quite the contrary, it's the action of having given up everything. But they are so focused on their worthy action that the point of why they gave everything up has been lost. The problem with valuable activities is that they can become an end in themselves. Indeed, they can have such a controlling influence over our decisions that they skew our logic, so that everything, even the God we serve and worship has to stand in line coming after that which receives our priority attention. We reason to ourselves that our actions are entirely appropriate and proportionate, perhaps thinking:

"If I shirk my work, I won't have money to give to charity." Or,

"If I don't attend to my family and friends, where's the loving kindness in that?" Or

"If I don't take an active part in my social club that's a poor return for my membership!" Or,

"I've spent all week working on church stuff so, this Sunday, I'm going to put my feet up and just post my sermon on line!"

The good news is God gives us people and purposeful tasks to enjoy and love. However, thinking back to Harvest, without God's generosity we would have nothing. It is his divine love that he lavishes on us that makes us who we are and what we have.

There will always be conflicts of claims on our time. Today's readings indicate, however, that the way we exercise our Christian life boils down to how much we value our faith and worship of God. Prayerful hearts prioritise faithfully.

Amen.