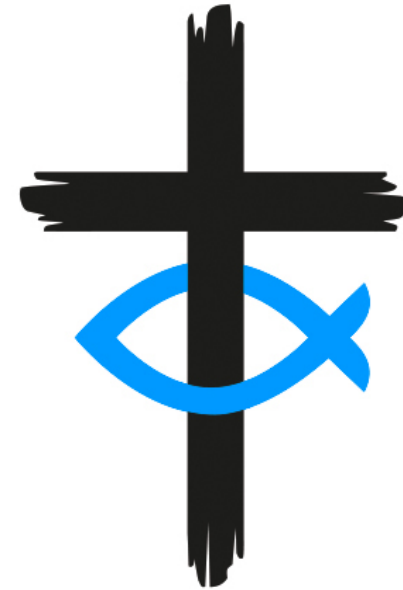


Daily Devotions from the URC

1st April – Holy Saturday 2019

St Luke (8)



Introduction

We continue with our journey through St Luke's Gospel. This booklet takes us up to the end of Holy Week.

Andy Braunston

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Monday 1st April Lost Sheep and Coin	3
Tuesday 2nd April The Prodigal	4
Wednesday 3rd April The Dishonest Manager	6
Thursday 4th April The Law, The Kingdom and Divorce	8
Friday 5th April The Rich Man and Lazarus	10
Saturday 6th April Various Sayings	11
Sunday 7th April Lent 5 Psalm 93	13
Monday 8th April Cleansing 10 Lepers	14
Tuesday 9th April The Coming of the Kingdom.....	16
Wednesday 10th April The Widow and Unjust Judge	17
Thursday 11th April The Pharisee and the Tax Collector	19
Friday 12th April Jesus Blesses the Children	20
Saturday 13th April The Rich Young Man.....	22
Sunday 14th April Palm Sunday	23
Monday 15th April Judas	25
Tuesday 16th April The Institution of the Lord's Supper	27
Wednesday 17th April	28
Thursday 18th April Maundy Thursday The Last Supper	31
Friday 19th April Good Friday The End	34
Saturday 20th April Holy Saturday The End.....	37

But I sometimes wonder about our Joe. Was he really that righteous? It could be that this was just a case of wanting things to get done – he was working to a deadline, after all. The sun was about to set, Sabbath was about to begin and the issue of what to do with Jesus' body needed to be dealt with quickly.

Maybe Joe was just a stickler for the rules?

When it comes to making decisions, choosing a path...what guides you?

Are you a stickler for the rules? Or 'good and righteous'?

Loving God, Joseph didn't know what would happen when he gave the burial plot to Jesus' followers. He just did. Give us the generosity of spirit and action to just do what is right when the time comes. Amen

[Monday 1st April](#) [Lost Sheep and Coin](#)

The Rev'd Jo Clare-Young is minister of the North Yorkshire Coast Pastorate of the URC.

St Luke 15: 1 - 10

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. 'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Reflection

I worried about some strange things as a child; many of them to do with God. Watching the first space shuttle take off, I worried about it hitting an angel or, even worse, hitting God. On Palm Sunday, I worried about whether any of the disciples remembered to return the donkey to its owner. I worried about the sheep in this parable too, not the lost one, because it gets found, but the other ones. The sheep left all alone whilst the shepherd hunts for that one, privileged, lost sheep.

I have rather different worries today. I worry about the ever-evolving family at church. We rejoice, of course, when a new sheep finds our flock, we welcome them in with joy, rejoicing in their presence. We should also, though, be rejoicing in the wonderful people already in our church family, even if there are not quite 99 of them. Affirming and appreciating all they do for our community just as joyfully as we affirm and appreciate the new sheep.

What I worry about more are the people who fade out of our fellowship, our church family. How often do we fail to notice the lone sheep that has wandered off? They, too, are a lost sheep and we must go looking for them. We must not be so focused on the front door that we miss those drifting out of the back one.

We are all shepherds with sheep. Not all of our sheep are in church. There are sheep that we forget until a Christmas Card or postcard arrives; sheep we mean to phone, or email or pray for, but we just forget. There's always tomorrow...right? I wonder if you can think of a sheep you have lost track of. A sheep that needs to be found. Maybe you can track them down and rejoice.

*God of wandering sheep,
We rejoice that you found us,
that you never stop bringing us back to the fold.
Keep us from drifting and wandering,
make each one of us a sheep dog,
attentive to your whistle. Amen*

Tuesday 2nd April The Prodigal

Fay Rowland, graduate student at Wesley House, Cambridge Theological Federation, St Botolph's Church, Northants.

St Luke 15: 11 - 32

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So

*Lord Jesus,
your Kingdom is so different from our empire
that even you could not find the words to explain the difference.
Your life of sacrifice and service is so different
from our life of luxury and self-indulgence
that only in your death could you point the way to true life.
Strengthen us neither to accept the cruelties of empire around us
nor to despair at their apparent invincibility,
but rather to take up our cross and follow you to the end. Amen.*

Saturday 20th April Holy Saturday The End

Leo Roberts is the Children and Youth Development Officer for the North Western Synod

St Luke 23: 50 - 56

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Reflection

Where would we be without 'good and righteous men'? And good and righteous women too, of course... they are the people that do the right thing, at the right time. Or, at least, try to.

All too often they are that voice crying out in the wilderness. Or those inviting people on different sides of an argument to, perhaps, shout a little less and respect each other a little more.

saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Reflection

The Roman Empire was one of the cruellest and most violent in human history. Its power covered most of the known world. The head of a small subservient nation could have his soldiers mock and scorn an accused over whom he had no jurisdiction. An Imperial Governor could find someone innocent and then have him flogged anyway in order to satisfy the crowd. He could then reverse the verdict in order to keep the 'peace'. The imperial guard could force a passing black man to carry the instruments of death in order to save them the trouble. Yet with the benefit of hindsight we now know that at the very height of its absolute power the seeds of destruction of this empire were being sown. Its hubris was unsustainable. It had grown too big to effectively defend its borders. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire had begun.

Our capitalist empire is one of the cruellest and most violent in human history. Its power covers the whole world - the very last tribes to escape its clutches have been conquered. Small subservient nations elect dictators to shoot the drug-runners and street children on sight. Large imperial powers can send bombers to bomb whomsoever they wish with no retribution, and with drones they need not even risk their own armed forces. Innocent people can be gaoled or executed to keep the 'peace'. Black, brown and indigenous peoples continue to carry the white man's burden. Yet with the benefit of science and a little foresight we know that at the very height of its absolute power the seeds of destruction of this empire are being sown. Our fossil fuel guzzling way of life is unsustainable. We cannot effectively defend our borders against the billions of dispossessed. The decline and fall of capitalist industrial 'civilization' has begun.

It was to an empire such as this that Jesus came. It was at the hands of an empire such as this that Jesus died. Astonishingly, it was within an empire such as this that Jesus would rise again.

he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Reflection

We know this story well: The Prodigal Son. But just what is a prodigal? It's one of those words, like manger and Samaritan, that is mostly used in the context of a Biblical story and so has lost its meaning.

Unless you work with horses, you might think that manger means cot, and most folks today associate Samaritans with kind, helpful people. And prodigal? The Cambridge dictionary has 'prodigal: spending large amounts of money without thinking of the future, in a way that is not wise.' But that's not what the word really means, and anyway, I'd argue that the title is wrong: it's not the son who is prodigal in this story, it's the father!

Jesus told the story as part of a series - the lost sheep, the lost coin and this, the lost son - each ending with 'rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents'. The Pharisees were complaining because Jesus was welcoming sinners. These stories were Jesus' answer to the Pharisees, and it is clear to see who is who. The lost sheep, the lost son, the lost coin is the sinner. The jealous son, the 99

who (think they) have no need to repent is the Pharisee, the religious person secure in their own righteousness. The shepherd, the housewife, the father rejoicing over what was lost, is God.

So who is the prodigal? Who squanders his riches on the undeserving? Who spends freely without thought of return? Who lavishes his grace on those who can never possibly repay his generosity? Who gives without limit to those who have never done a thing to deserve it?

The father.

Our Prodigal Father in Heaven, who 'wastes' his love those who do not deserve it. That's me, and that's you. All of us.

It's so good to be home.

*O Prodigal Father,
we feel welcome in your arms, undeserved.
We hear forgiveness in your voice, unearned.
We see warmth in your eyes, unmerited.
May we reflect that warmth to those around us,
May we return that forgiveness to these who wound us.
May we respond with warmth as we love,
because you first loved us.*

[Wednesday 3rd April The Dishonest Manager](#)

The Rev'd John Durell, retired minister and member of Waddington Street URC, Durham

St Luke 16: 1 - 13

Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager,

release him.' But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion

Friday 19th April Good Friday The End

The Rev'd Gethin Rhys is National Assembly Policy Officer for Cytun (Churches Together in Wales) and a member of Parkminster URC, Cardiff.

St Luke 23: 1 - 49

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, 'We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.' Then Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' He answered, 'You say so.' Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no basis for an accusation against this man.' But they were insistent and said, 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.'

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him.'

Then they all shouted out together, 'Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!' (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, 'Crucify, crucify him!' A third time he said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then

people may welcome me into their homes." So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty." Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty." And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. 'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

Reflection

Having just given us one of Jesus's best known and loved stories, Luke now turns to his most puzzling! What on earth are we to make of it?

I've noticed one word that is central to both stories: "squander". The son in the first story could have used his premature inheritance more carefully, and perhaps built bridges with his hurt father. Instead he blew it all. And here we find the manager, acting as middle man between patron and clients who are uncomfortable dealing directly with one another, destroying his chances of a good and steady income. Both central characters face the same dilemma of how to put things right.

Only in this case, it's hard to think that the wronged party is going to be in a forgiving mood. That's not the way the world of finance and business usually works! And even if Jesus's hearers were peasants unlikely to side with the rich man, they can surely see that the manager's so-called shrewdness is really dishonesty. And that the debtors are every bit as bad as the manager himself.

But what does Jesus say? "Make friends by means of dishonest wealth." There surely has to be irony here. And since he compares the "children of this age"

with the “children of light”, it’s pretty clear that manager, debtors and the rich man himself are all tarred with the same brush. It’s leading up to the conclusion we all dread: we can’t serve God and serve wealth.

It’s hard to get all the nuances of the text, but we shouldn’t miss the little detail of what happens if we do try to make friends through “dishonest wealth”. There’s the promise of being welcomed into “the eternal homes” – only note that the word translated “homes” is really “tents” . And even with today’s best water-proofing and UV blocker materials, tents don’t last for ever!

*Good and generous God
help us not to squander
our richest opportunities in life.
Beyond the conflicting claims of this world
may we glimpse the promises that do not fade
and give of our very best in serving you. Amen*

Thursday 4th April The Law, The Kingdom and Divorce

The Rev’d Andy Braunston is a Minister in the Southside Cluster of the Synod of Scotland serving Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton URCs.

St Luke 16: 14 - 18

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. So he said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God. ‘The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped. ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Reflection

Jesus’ words on divorce are hard for us in an age when divorce, if not commonplace, does not, rightly, bring the connotations of shame that it once did. Jesus’ words, however, would have shocked his original hearers. Divorce

death, it is also a moment to know deep in our hearts that Jesus does not condemn us.

Jesus didn’t betray his disciples and he doesn’t betray us, even in his great fear. He doesn’t betray the lost and lonely, the fearful and oppressed. Jesus stays with us around the fire or in an upstairs room with a towel around his waist, sharing our fear and anxiety and he will stay with us even if it means his death.

It is as if we forget that we sang ‘O come, O come Emmanuel’ just a few months ago. ‘God is with us’ and nothing changes that, not even the events we know are to come...

*O Come, O come, thou wisdom strange
from deep within God’s womb to range
the earth at midnight’s hour of fears
to make us wise beyond our years.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Our God shall leap
with light that rouses us from sleep.*

*O Come, O come, thou healing host
around whose table none can boast,
who welcomes home the stigmatized,
their rightful place now realized.
Rejoice! Rejoice! By touching hand
together all in God shall stand.*

*O Come, O come, Emmanuel,
God-with-us here and now to dwell,
at one with our humanity,
in whom we find our destiny.
Rejoice! Rejoice! The human face
of God with us shall interlace.*

Verses taken from ‘Expectant: Verses for Advent’ by Jim Cotter, 2002

remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, 'Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?' They kept heaping many other insults on him.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. They said, 'If you are the Messiah, tell us.' He replied, 'If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.' All of them asked, 'Are you, then, the Son of God?' He said to them, 'You say that I am.' Then they said, 'What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!'

Reflection

The image of those disciples sat round a fire, has really struck me this year.

Jesus has been seized and led away, with Peter following at a distance no doubt to see where he was taken. After all the upheaval, and still reeling, the disciples sit around a fire and Peter returns to them.

We get a sense that others in the community must have witnessed what happened, as it seems they are keeping their own beady-eyes out for anyone connected with this Jesus character. Over the space of an hour, as the disciples warm themselves in their fear and shock, three people recognise Peter – and he denies Him – and the cock crows.

I cannot say that I would do any different, were I seeking reassurance with my friends around a fire after witnessing the one I follow being forcibly arrested.

Would I be next on the list? Next to be taken? Next to be judged and killed?

"I do not know what you are talking about!"

Whilst this is a moment for us to lament the overwhelming fear or indifference that causes us to deny those that our culture and way of life condemns to

was easy in both Roman and Jewish society - a Jewish man had only to write a bill of divorce and give it to his wife for the marriage to be over. This sounds harsh for us but Jewish law tried to protect women - the simple fact of presenting a written bill slowed things down and stopped men divorcing in a fit of anger - they had to go and find someone literate and be knowledgeable enough to know how to write a bill of divorce. The rabbis forbade a man to divorce without paying some form of alimony - based on the, to us, crude notion that the wife had been defiled by sex with her husband. The Bible forbids a man to divorce a woman he had falsely accused of pre-marital relations or if he had raped her as a virgin (Deut 22: 13-21). To us this is all rather crude and sexist, yet the rabbis had tried to protect women from an absolute right for men to divorce their wives.

Divorce, in the ancient world, meant destitute for women if they had no wider family to take them in. They might have had to work as prostitutes in order to simply live. Jesus continues the tradition of the rabbis in trying to protect women; his (to us) harsh words would have protected women from being cast aside at will in the Church. The irony then is, divorced from context, Jesus' teaching on divorce has been, and still is, used to oppress women, in particular, who are taught that divorce is sinful. When coupled with other Biblical passages about wifely obedience interpretations can become toxic. Pray for those for whom Biblical interpretation is used as a weapon of oppression instead of a tool of liberation.

*Lord Jesus,
you welcomed women who had been abused,
lifted a woman from the dust,
chatted to a woman who was trying to avoid the gossip,
and healed those whom men had declared unclean;
give us the grace to welcome, lift up, chat with and bring healing
to those who, today, are in need of your liberating love.
Amen.*

St Luke 16: 19 - 31

'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Reflection

I am writing in the week that The Guardian featured an article, World's 26 richest people own as much as poorest 50%, says Oxfam. According to the report

- In the ten years since the financial crisis, the number of billionaires has nearly doubled.
- Between 2017 and 2018 a new billionaire was created every two days.
- Just 1% of the fortunes of the world's richest man, Jeff Bezos, is equivalent to the whole health budget for Ethiopia, a country of 105 million people.

St Luke 22: 39-71

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?' When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, 'This man also was with him.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.' A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!' Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, 'Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!' At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter

I sent you out with nothing and you had all that you needed, but you still crave more.

This upside down Kingdom stuff is hard, even for those who spent all their time with Jesus. But then they knew they were not Jesus, so how could they be like Jesus? They were just people. Women and men who watched and wondered but never quite grasped, who listened but never quite understood, who imitated but never quite became.

Soon it will be your turn.

Yes... you.

With all your faults and failings, all our pettiness and jealousies, all your aspiration and ambition.

Even the swords are there to make the point (pardon the pun!) that the way you think power works isn't how it actually works with God.

The more great you must be less. To lead you must serve. To be trusted by others you must trust completely in God.

*We still don't get it, God.
All the stuff the world tells us
Is wrong.
Winning isn't everything.
Greed isn't good.
The end doesn't justify the means.*

*Show us our place
in your upside down kingdom.
Help us to put aside ego
And take up service,
To let go of our own desires
And meet others' needs,
And in doing so
Find our world transformed
Into your world. Amen*

It is tempting to read the parable – and Oxfam's report – and for many of us to conclude, "I am not the rich one" (sometimes given the name 'Dives'). We are likely to do so on the basis of bank balance. We might want to consider the challenge at the heart of this gospel passage: namely, that the problem for Dives was not so much his wealth but the realisation that he should have acted with greater grace but left it too late to do anything.

That sobering realisation – that sense of regret – may well be a regular experience for us: with hindsight we can see that we might have acted differently. It could just as easily be little to do with money but rather using our time and ordering our priorities more wisely. How often, for example, do we regret that we have allowed too many months or years to pass before being in contact with those whose company and care we say we value? How often do we wish we could turn back the clock and react differently in particular situations? Poor – yes, poor – old Dives learns the painful lesson that there comes a time when it is too late to put things right (or even to help others avoid making the same mistake). May God prevent us falling into the same trap!

*Almighty God,
source of everything we have and are,
keep us alert to every opportunity
to make life better or bearable for those we encounter.
May the generosity of our words and deeds
reflect your love made manifest in Jesus.
Spare us from the regret of responding too meanly and too late
and grant us a sense of urgency
to play our part in transforming the world, our nation and community
while there is yet time to do so. Amen.*

[Saturday 6th April Various Sayings](#)

The Rev'd Ruth Watson, Minister at Patricroft and Worsley Road URCS

St Luke 17: 1 - 9

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.

And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent", you must forgive.' The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' The Lord replied, 'If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you. 'Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, "Come here at once and take your place at the table"? Would you not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink"? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!"'

Reflection

Awards Season – Oscars, The Golden Globes, Baftas, National Television Awards to name a few. And don't forget Sports Personality of the Year and the New Year's Honours Lists.

Call me cynical, but what are we actually awarding? There is criticism for the Honours List that they are given out to the Old Boys' Club and it's not what you have done but who you know that counts.

We award footballers and managers millions for being able to kick a ball around the pitch, yet heart surgeons and paramedics save people's lives for a lot less. Frustration is caused at school as truant children are rewarded for attending, when those who attend as they are supposed to are ignored.

Have we skewed what is worthy? Jesus warns the disciples not to expect rewards for doing what they were meant to do. A slave's job was to serve their master, not expect to dine at his table for doing a good days job.

I'm all for acknowledging a job well done, or giving thanks for hard work and effort, but we must not expect to be rewarded because we did our job. Those who truly deserve the new year's honours, or the huge bonuses, or the front page spread are those who work tirelessly without the spotlight, who do what they do best without waiting for the camera to watch them do it. The true "unsung" heroes, who love what they do and do what they love.

them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. 'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

'Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.' And he said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!' Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.'

He said to them, 'When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'No, not a thing.' He said to them, 'But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, "And he was counted among the lawless"; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.' They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' He replied, 'It is enough.'

Reflection

It's such a playground argument. Who is the greatest?

But of course there's a bigger lesson to be learned for a group of people who seemed to have learned very little.

You have no idea what greatness even is!

Everything you think greatness is made up of... it isn't. Everything you think is the opposite of greatness is actually what greatness really is.

And the lesson continues.

You've stood by me... but you won't.

wine being His blood would have been received by Jewish believers with shock – putting it mildly!

By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, some 20 years after the events - the very text recited at our Communion services - had lost the raw emotion which those present at the Last Supper would have felt. Yet during Holy Week, we allow ourselves to revisit what we, euphemistically, call 'The Passion'.

Although not to everyone's taste, two films evoke 'The Passion' for me: the Rice/Lloyd-Webber musical "Jesus Christ, Superstar" and Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of The Christ". The musical explores individuals' profound and life-changing responses to Jesus; and the film exposes us to the sheer horror of His sacrifice.

As we journey together through Holy Week, may God grant us the grace to experience 'The Passion' afresh.

*O, Lamb of God, You set us free:
You take our sins away from us.
For all we have, and all we are:
We give you thanks, and praise Your name.*

*O, Lamb of God, You set us free:
Your grace abounds in Love to all.
You died for us, and our response
Demands our souls, our lives, our all.*

(Can be sung to the tune "Rockingham" [When I Survey...])

Wednesday 17th April

The Rev'd Stewart Cutler is minister of St Ninian's Stonehouse, an LEP of the Church of Scotland and the URC.

St Luke 22: 24 - 38

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over

The saying goes "choose a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life". May we do what we do best, and do it to our best, and that will be all the reward we need.

Forgive us Lord when we:

- place obstacles in the paths of others so we can get ahead.

- put ourselves first so we get the better deal

- forget others so we are noticed

Fill us with your Spirit, remind us so we are loved so we share love with others.

Then we will have no need to be the star for we will know we are precious and loved for who we are. Amen

Sunday 7th April Lent 5 Psalm 93

The Rev'd George Watt, Minister at Reigate Park URC

1 The LORD is king;
his throne endures
majestic in his height.

The LORD is robed in majesty
and armed with strength and might.

The world is founded firm and sure—
removed it cannot be.

2 Your throne is strong,
and you are God
from all eternity.

3 The seas, O LORD, have lifted up,
they lifted up their voice;

The seas have lifted up their waves
and made a mighty noise.

4 The LORD, enthroned on high,
is strong;
more powerful is he
Than thunder of the ocean's waves
or breakers of the sea.

5 Your royal statutes, LORD,
stand firm;
unchanging is your word.
And holiness adorns your house
for endless days, O LORD.

Reflection

Three times recently I have found myself back in the church I grew up in, once as a preacher and twice in the congregation. It brought back memories of my childhood when the service would always begin with the singing of a Psalm. Ever since the Psalms have been important to me and I often find myself returning to them for encouragement and comfort. That is true of this Psalm.

The Psalmist speaks of the kingship of God. In my old church there is a high central pulpit and the beadle (a kind of religious usher) would follow the minister up the steps and close the door behind him. The story is told of a boy attending church listening to a fiery preacher. Filled with terror, the boy turned to his mother and said, 'What will we do if he gets out of there.' This Psalm speaks not of a distant God in heaven to be afraid of but one who comes and takes on opposing powers in the shape of the unruly waters on the earth. I am glad that God is not caged in heaven but is present here on earth when circumstances might threaten to engulf us.

The minister of my childhood would always be dressed in black cassock and gown, which could also be a bit scary if I didn't know him to be a kindly person. God is described as being robed, robed in majesty. Ministerial robes can equally be reassuring. Even more comforting is the picture of God robed in majesty who won't allow life to overwhelm us, who comes to confront the chaos of our world.

*Dear God,
You are the creator and re-creator.
In the beginning you brought order out of chaos
and today you want to re-establish order out of the disorder,
some of which has been of our own making.
In our shifting and changing world we thank you that
you are the king in whom we can place our trust. Amen*

Monday 8th April Cleansing 10 Lepers

The Rev'd Nick Jones is minister at Heswall URC & St. George's URC, Thornton Hough

St Luke 17: 11 - 19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were

Tuesday 16th April The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Walt Johnson, Elder; Wilbraham St Ninian's, Chorlton, Manchester

St Luke 22: 14 - 23

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!' Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Reflection

Of the four Gospels, Luke offers us the most serene account of the Last Supper. In contrast, the others place Jesus' foresight of His betrayal before the meal, which gave rise to emotional upset between the Disciples and probably indigestion! In Luke, the discord follows the meal.

As Christians, we have probably attended countless Communion services: for some, it is weekly; for others, less frequently. The ways in which this Sacrament is administered in our denomination, and across the Christian world, are many and varied.

As familiar and comfortable as we may be with how Communion is administered in our churches, let us remember that Jesus' words and actions on that evening were momentous: He departed from the centuries-old Passover tradition.

A few years ago, I participated in an inter-faith radio project, during which I spent time with an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi. During one of our conversations, he described to me how Jesus' words about the bread being His body, and the

harsh judgement and of the core group of disciples accompanying Jesus his is the name to which no churches or good causes are dedicated. The Gospel writers describe his actions as Devil-inspired and to ensure that no sympathy is evoked for him we are told that he took money for his act of betrayal. In John 12:6 we are also encouraged to regard him as a thief, helping himself to the contents of the disciples' common purse. In today's reading he is seen conferring with those who want rid of Jesus and they are "greatly pleased". Money is pledged in return for the betrayal of God's priceless gift.

The scene in the Garden of Gethsemane – when Judas greets Jesus with a kiss not as a sign of affection but a clue for those coming to arrest him – is painful to behold. Ultimately, of course, the money is of no consolation at all when Judas realises the extent of his mistake and ends his life.

Before we condemn Judas' actions we do well to ponder whether we are entirely blameless ourselves when it comes to the guilt of betrayal. Are any of us completely trustworthy and loyal – to our faith or to those who count upon us? Holy Week is a timely opportunity for soul-searching as we contemplate Judas' betrayal within the context of the love of God abused, wounded, crucified yet abiding, and ask of ourselves: would I have acted any differently then? And, when faith becomes more demanding and costly than we might choose: do I remain steadfast or am I tempted to betray God, faith or principle in return for comfort?

*Almighty God,
whose love is richer than gold,
forgive us for our cheap acts of betrayal.
Have mercy on any and all
who have been betrayed by those who once loved them.
Grant peace to the betrayed and the betrayer.
May our lips and lives attest that our wealth is invested in you.
In the name of the One betrayed with a kiss
yet who on the Cross
declared pardon and paradise to the thief. Amen.*

not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

Reflection

It's a simple story at first glance. Ten 'lepers' – people with some sort of skin disease – ask Jesus for mercy and are told to show themselves to the priests. They are all made clean, but only one of the ten makes the effort to find Jesus and thank him. As with so many gospel passages there are various messages we could take from this compact but rich story. We could use it as an example of the power of faith, or the importance of being grateful for the blessings we receive. Alternatively, we could use the fact that the one who returns to say 'thank you' is a Samaritan – a foreigner! – as a demonstration that Jesus constantly crosses cultural and religious boundaries, reminding us not to make assumptions based on people's backgrounds and to be ready to cross borders.

There's also something else going on. What happens to these people after this incident? All of them are 'made clean', ready to re-enter a society which has shunned them. What has changed? The world is still the same, and they have had to change to fit in. The one who does return to say thank you is told by Jesus to 'go on your way', and so it seems the outcome is the same for all ten. And yet there is an important difference. All ten are 'made clean', but the thankful man gets a particular message from Jesus; he is told 'your faith has made you well'. This could be translated differently as 'made whole', or even 'saved.' All ten are cleansed, but only one is saved. Jesus' compassion reaches out to them all, but only one is truly transformed.

We could ask ourselves which outcome we are seeking. Do we really just want God to 'make us clean', take away our problems and suffering and make life easy, or do we really desire to be disruptively 'made whole' and transformed?

*Loving and almighty God,
like the one who came back we thank you for all you have done for us,
for all your love and compassion,
We ask too that through your love we can be made whole, and that, in being transformed, we can help others change your lives
and help to build your Kingdom. Amen.*

St Luke 17: 20 - 37

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.' Then he said to the disciples, 'The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. They will say to you, "Look there!" or "Look here!" Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed all of them —it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left.' Then they asked him, 'Where, Lord?' He said to them, 'Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.'

Reflection

This passage does not appear in the three-year Lectionary at all. It is interesting to consider why for a few moments, especially when the subject matter is Jesus talking about the Kingdom and its coming.

Jesus begins by explaining that the Kingdom isn't a material thing that can be seen, but that doesn't stop the Kingdom being tangible because it is around and among us through the way people are. I know that this might seem wishy-washy but think of it like this; it is the difference between a "Sunday Christian" and

Jesus has done for us? Or have we been silent, leaving it to the stones to shout out?

Lord we celebrate Palm Sunday, when you rode into Jerusalem, heralded as King of Kings. We praise you. Help us to speak up for you, to go public and share of your great love. Forgive us Lord for the times, when we like the stones have been silent. Help us today to acknowledge you in all we do and say. Amen

Monday 15th April Judas

The Rev'd Geoffrey Clarke, Minister, The Crossing (Methodist & United Reformed Church), Worksop and Wales Kiveton Methodist Church

St Luke 22: 1-13

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Reflection

Well beyond the pages of the Gospels and walls of the Church the name "Judas" is synonymous with treachery and betrayal. To be accused of "doing a Judas" is

Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.' As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.' Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; 46 and he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it a den of robbers.' Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Reflection

Today, Palm Sunday, is the day we remember how everything began to unravel for Jesus. Up till now he had been clear, those who had been healed or witnessed miracles, should not tell anyone about them. Because, 'His time had not yet come'. Not that everyone listened to him, when the leper was healed, he began to 'talk freely, spreading the news'. As a result, Jesus could 'no longer enter a town openly, but stayed outside in lonely places'. On Palm Sunday far from being in lonely places, Jesus had 'Set his face towards the city of Jerusalem'. The crowds were buzzing, proclaiming 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!' But Jesus, the once reluctant hero, didn't stop them, despite the Pharisee's protestations, he declared, 'I tell you if these were silent, the stones would shout out'. His time had now come and there was excitement, tears and anger. It was an emotional day and for him, there was no going back. On this Palm Sunday perhaps we should consider, have we gone public and shared what

"Jesus Follower". A "Sunday Christian" might dress nicely for worship and make a big noise about going to church but leaves the teaching and Jesus following inside the building, but a "Jesus Follower" will use the hour – two hours on a Sunday to recharge and renew their batteries for the week ahead where they live their faith and follow Jesus through their deeds in the local and wider community.

Jesus doesn't mince his words when he speaks about the end times, he states EVERYONE will know when it happens, that believers and nonbelievers will all see/know that Jesus has returned, that only some will be taken, which implies that those not taken are left behind. The interesting part is that Jesus doesn't say who will be taken, it is grace that saves us and because of that grace we get to be a part of the now and not yet of the Kingdom through our works in the world.

Maybe the Lectionary cuts this part of Luke because it reminds us that nothing is for sure and we have to trust and believe, and in many ways that can be the most difficult part of faith.

*Eternal God,
there are many things that we struggle to comprehend about you;
enable us to have faith and trust even though we don't understand.
Challenge us to live lives that reflect the grace you have given us
demonstrating the now, and not yet, of the Kingdom. Amen.*

[Wednesday 10th April The Widow and Unjust Judge](#)

The Rev'd Martha McInnes, Chaplain, Willen Hospice, Milton Keynes

St Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his

chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’

Reflection

“Nevertheless, she persisted.” It would have been easier to give up. It would have been easier to keep quiet. It would have been easier to just walk away. It would have been easier to try a more sympathetic judge. “Nevertheless, she persisted.” The widow was one of the least powerful people in her culture. She relied on men, husbands, uncles, sons, cousins, to give her status. Being described as a “widow” suggests that she had been stripped of all that status—no men defined her, and no men protected her. She wouldn’t have been expected to confront a judge, much less confront him again and again and again, unrelenting in her demand for justice. “Nevertheless (despite cultural norms), she persisted.”

This story is often used to teach the importance of persistence in prayer. Perhaps, however, it is not just about prayer. Perhaps, for those who follow Jesus, it is guide for seeking what is right and just. The widow said, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” She didn’t give up until the judge was worn down, and he ruled for her. This judge was the least likely person to change, being someone who didn’t care about God and God’s laws, yet her persistence led to change and justice.

Being God’s people requires persistence. “Change doesn’t happen overnight.” Often the powers we are confronting are just like the judge—people who don’t have any faith, who care about their own interests, who prefer to ignore the needs of others. So we have to write letters, make phone calls, create rallies, attend meetings, again and again and again. We cannot give up—that’s what the powerful want and expect. We do get tired. We do get frustrated, but we persist. We persist because God wants good for all people. We are called to be the widow, persisting in the face of indifference for those who need justice today.

God of the widow and the judge, give us ears that are open to hear cries for justice. Give us eyes that are open to see the needs around us. Give us voices to speak to power for those who are in need. Give us courage to persist for the right way. Amen.

How many times have we patted ourselves on the back, thinking ourselves to be truly righteous rule-followers, when in actual fact we have failed to live in love? As a chaplain, working on the railways and for the police, I see part of my job as helping people to think about their obligations to each other as well as to their jobs. In aspects such as safety, the two overlap, as a worker will seek to obey the safety procedures out of a sense of duty to the rules and also to their co-workers. But the overriding sense is a commitment to keeping one another safe out of a feeling of concern for them, not because of what the rules say.

Another question arises relating to the importance the young man places on his wealth and possessions, and we get some more insight into this when we read Matthew 6. Jesus makes it clear that there is a choice to be made in the young man’s case. On the one hand he can hang onto his money – on the other he can hang onto Jesus. He can’t do both. Which one is to be his master in the end?

Lord Jesus, help us to always be sensitive to the needs of those around us. Although you do not ask all of us to give up all we own, please prompt us by your Spirit to be generous with what you have graciously given us, be that money, possessions, time or talent. And may none of us give our trust and devotion to the wrong master, but always turn to you in humility. Amen

Sunday 14th April Palm Sunday

****we take the Palm Sunday reading out of order, to fit with the liturgical year****

The Revd Sally Willett, minister of West Thamesmead Community Church and Evangelism and Renewal Advocate for GEAR.

St Luke 19 : 29 - 48

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” just say this: “The Lord needs it.”’ So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They said, ‘The Lord needs it.’ Then they brought it to

St Luke 18: 18 - 30

A certain ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother."' He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.' Then Peter said, 'Look, we have left our homes and followed you.' And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.'

Reflection

When the rich young man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus lists some commandments, but interestingly leaves out the two most important ones. The young man says he has been keeping these laws, but Jesus then asks him to give all his wealth to the poor. The young man walks away sad because he is rich.

This event serves to illustrate that though the young man thought he was keeping all the commandments, he wasn't adhering to the spirit of them. He failed to show love to his neighbour by relinquishing his worldly possessions, as Jesus had asked him to. He also failed to love God by walking away from Jesus' invitation to "come, follow me."

St Luke 18: 9 - 14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

Reflection

The self-righteous, judgmental religious are familiar people in literature and wider culture. It's easier to think of such examples than of more positive role models! And it's true that I've met some of those people - but I've probably met more people both in church and in my wider life who live with feelings of unworthiness and guilt than otherwise. On the other hand, I suspect we can all think of people in church circles who pretend to humility as a slightly nauseating tactic for getting their own way, so we might not be inclined to accept apparently humble behaviour unquestioningly.

So what might we take from this parable? I'd suggest the key is being honest to God and to ourselves. It's not about putting on some cosmetic behaviours any more than it is about continuing to delude ourselves about our own perfection.

But part of that honesty needs to be recognising the positives we bring as well as the behaviours we regret. It is not Pharisaical for a healthcare professional to be proud of the care they give, or for a teacher to know that they've helped their students develop. Or more domestically, to recognise the positive impacts our family and neighbours feel from us. Rather, we should give thanks for the gifts and talents we might have, and reflect on whether we are using them in ways that further the kingdom of God, as well as praying that God may help us amend our lives.

*Listening God,
You know us thoroughly
even when we turn a blind eye
to our own weaknesses*

*Help us to grow in honesty:
with you, ourselves and each other.*

*May we know our own gifts and talents
and use them wisely;
May we know our weaknesses
and be prepared to lean on others.*

*Through all this may we be faithful disciples
and show your love to the world in the way we live. Amen.*

Friday 12th April [Jesus Blesses the Children](#)

The Rev'd Jenny Mills. Newport Pagnell URC and West End United Church, Wolverton. Convenor of the URC Children's and Youth Work Committee.

St Luke 18: 15 - 17

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'

Reflection:

Who has heard someone say 'children are the Church of the future'? How does it make you feel? The issue is, they are the Church of now! So often in churches we seek to keep children in their place, we view them as projects to be managed and minds to be shaped until they come of age and can take over from us! Because of course, we have all the answers and we know best.....

Jesus' disciples were chastised for thinking they knew best where children were concerned. They decided that Jesus did not want to be bothered with them and were trying to get those bringing them (most likely the women) to go away.

Like adults, children are co-creators with God. Like adults, children can encounter God and find faith. They do not need to be put in their place, but allowed to be equal partners on our journeys where we can bless and inspire each other and faith can flourish.

Jesus' teaching reminds us again and again that there is a different way, a way that encourages, builds up, loves unconditionally- a way that builds up God's kingdom here on earth. And he reminds the disciples and those encountering the Gospel words for the first time, and us too, that to be able to receive the Kingdom we need to be like children.

How do we experience that? Jesus reminds his disciples that the Kingdom belongs to the children: those without status and self-sufficiency. Being received into the Kingdom is a gift of grace, not something earned or striven for. We can only receive the Kingdom if we are prepared to acknowledge our dependence on God (and others) and let go of our need for power and position, and allow God to help us live a faithful life.

Children have a lot to teach us. Let us listen to them, really listen to them. Value them. Love them. And be prepared to learn from them.

*Lord Jesus,
you love the little children,
the old people, the wise, the foolish,
the powerful and the weak.
Within that love,
help us to learn from
the children we encounter
and take heed of their reliance on help, support, and love.
May we accept it graciously, too.
Help us to let go of our need for power and status,
as we seek to embody you through our lives. Amen.*