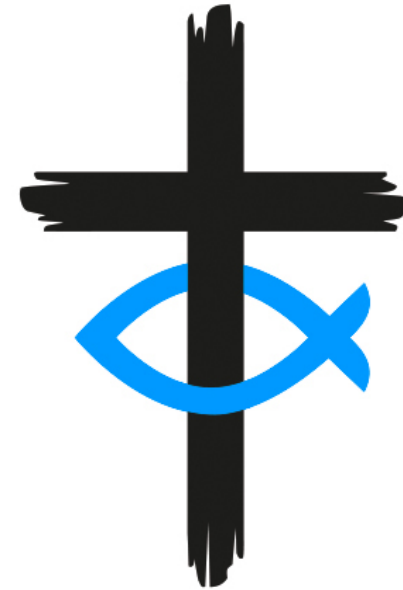


Daily Devotions from the URC
Easter Sunday – 4th May 2019
St Luke (9)



Introduction

We conclude our journey through St Luke's Gospel.

Andy Braunston

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might just cope with readings like these in Advent when we try and think about the Second Coming but it is a topic we like to push out of our heads.

The Early Church didn't have that luxury. They lived with persecution in a hostile culture. The peace of Rome was really military oppression - as the Jewish people found out when Jerusalem (was) surrounded by armies and then they knew that its desolation had come near. In this, the Early Church looked to Jesus for their hope, believing he'd come again and set all things right.

We still live with wars - not rumours of them as our 24/7 news cycle mean we don't rely on rumours but on striking images of devastation from around the world. We still live with persecution - not in the West where the worse that happens to the Church is a pernicious indifference - but in Asia one in three Christians experience persecution.

I hope those who are persecuted now find hope in Jesus' promise to be with them, to help them witness and the promise they will not perish but gain their souls. I hope passages like this make us work harder for political change in our world where no one is persecuted for what they believe, how they live, or who they love.

*O God,
whose words do not pass away,
but give life and endurance,
free us from the traps of life,
help us to see what passes in our society
and give us the grace to change the world,
through Jesus Christ,
in the power of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.*

St Luke 24: 1 - 12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Reflection

Early on Resurrection morning, before the normal time of waking, the first visitors to the tomb are a band of women undertaking the task which they would have felt to be a part of their role in society during those days. Quietly, perhaps in a sense of "going through the motions," and probably not remembering the words of Jesus, somberly they approach the tomb. To their amazement the stone has been rolled away. Has somebody beaten them to this task? Was there a sense of foreboding even as they made their way to the tomb? Has somebody stolen their much loved Jesus' body? Very quickly all such thoughts are dispelled from mind as the words of the two men ring true, bringing about the truth of what had happened since that fateful day they had witnessed which we know as "Good Friday."

From then on they seem no more women doing what might have been thought of as a menial task, but are now doubted and their accounts reported as "idle words," that is until Peter comes on the scene. Then somehow, everything slots into place, the words of their dead Saviour become as alive as He is Himself. The

words of New Life resounding loud and clear as the truth of what had happened sinks into their understanding, their thinking and their experience.

However, I wonder how often the Lord might say to us the words which the two men, usually assumed to be angels, said to the faithful women? “Why do you look for the living among the dead. He is not here he has risen.” Do we still dwell at times as though we are in the days following Jesus’ crucifixion rather than realising the full impact of the truth that three days later Jesus arose and IS alive? Dare I say that the only way in which we can truly be His witnesses is as vessels of this new life, living as His Easter people 365 days of the year.

*Lord of new life, new hope, new victory, we praise you!
Lord of the impossible, bursting through
the fear of death, to release us from this last enemy, we worship you!
Lord of our lives, transform us with your new life,
that we may truly reflect your resurrection glory day by day, we adore you!
Lord of new life, we own you as our Lord, the triumphant One,
this day, for time and for eternity. Amen.*

[Monday 22nd April](#) [Easter Monday](#) [The Road to Emmaus](#)

The Rev’d Ruth Browning, Retired minister and member of Thornbury URC

St Luke 24: 13 - 35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this

friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls. ‘When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfilment of all that is written. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’ Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

Reflection

Passages like this make us uncomfortable with this emphasis on signs of the end of time. The types of Christians who focus on passages like this also make us uncomfortable with an emphasis on redemption coming after suffering. We

vulnerability surely meant that her very life was in God's hands; perhaps, in her poverty, she already knew strength in that reality. Perhaps the destruction of the Temple would be easier for her to comprehend than for those who measured their very worth by their relation to it.

The Temple was eventually destroyed, but around about the same time, word of God's love in Jesus was spreading to the ends of the earth. God goes before us, each day, into every place. Go out and seek God, seek resurrection in the darkest of places – and maybe even in the Church.

*Omnipotent God,
was the woman in this story, brave, or foolish, or faithful
when she gave all that she had to the Temple?
God can you make me all three for you?
Brave enough to let go of those physical things I cling to,
foolish enough to trust your strength in my vulnerability
faithful enough to work out your love in all that I do, Amen*

[Saturday 4th May Signs and Persecutions](#)

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

St Luke 21 7 - 37

They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them. 'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. 'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and

morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection

It was the era of "How many roads must a man walk down" when I first realised you didn't have to "go forward" at a Billy Graham convention to declare your faith, as my Sunday school teacher had, because there were many other roads. (Later, I realised the answer is "42". With apologies to those who don't know that joke.) For one man, possibly many, the answer was Jericho road, or maybe "up a tree", for another it was Damascus road while for others it was the "road" rowed across a lake. For Mary, maybe for many, it was a voice saying her name - that moment of contact with someone concentrating solely on you.

Afterwards, there is that moment of "how did I not know", which becomes the story you always tell. Followed by the relief when you realise others have similar moments of recognition. You, I, am not the only one who somehow failed to recognise someone so obvious until s/he had to use a well known gesture, phrase or look. In modern Britain it's easy to think you might be the only one, ever, to become Christian, and the relief of meeting others who think

the same is thrilling. Telling the story is how we discover others of faith and share it with those who have yet to recognise a faith.

How many times had the followers of Jesus watched and listened as Jesus shared a meal, saying the familiar berakah “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, ...”. Something they had always shared, in many places, now becomes that point of information and recognition. In the meal by which we recognise Christians round the world, whatever the language, sharing bread and wine has the same effect, whatever road we have taken.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, who gives to each the attention that allows everyone to walk the way to faith.

Thanks be to you, who gives us times when we can tell our story of faith, that others may hear and know that you are the Lord our God, Lord and father to all. Blessed be God forever.

[Tuesday 23rd April Easter Tuesday Jesus Appears to the Disciples](#)

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Prevett.

St Luke 24: 36 - 49

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

[Friday 3rd May The Widow's Offering](#)

Liz Kam, Church Related Community Worker, Levenshulme Inspire

St Luke 21:1 - 6

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.’ When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’

Reflection

Almost as a tag on line to this intriguing story, Jesus mentions the unimaginable; one day, the Temple - the permanent and literal house of God will be no more. The beautiful work of artisans, the innumerable sacrifices and dedications to God, the holy atmosphere, the historical community focal point, God's presence, all gone. It's an unthinkable situation.

What would the destruction of the Temple have meant to the woman who gave all that she had to the collection box? Deep sorrow and loss? Bitterness? Relief? Freedom?

We don't know why the woman put in all that she had. Was it because: she loved God; she loved the Temple; she was able to place her well being in God's hands; or because, whilst being watched by those with plenty, she felt ashamed not to?

Can you imagine a time when your church is no more? For many out there this will already be a painful reality, or one close enough to touch. What does church mean for you? Is God's presence limited to those 4 walls, the beauty in the building, that group of people, the rituals you share together, the weekly meetings and activities, the history of prayers made in that space?

In this story we see the frailty of our need for religious security. Whatever reason the woman gave all that she had to the Temple, the resulting

dependent on Temple life and no trace can be found of them following its destruction when Jerusalem was conquered.

One of the Sadducees' defining strands was that they only considered the Torah to be scripture and this led to their doctrinal view that there could be no resurrection as they found no such reference within the Books of the Law.

This group asked Jesus a loaded question based on the Levirate Law which was intended to protect inheritance and property.

Jesus dismisses the conundrum simply by refocussing the need for marriage in God's realm then quoting from the Torah offers the Sadducees new insights - God the God of the living Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The question of resurrection asked and answered.

I come back frequently to the vehicle for the teaching. Like a terrier I can't let go of the widow's experience in this story, however hypothetical, the notion of multiple bereavements, the loss of seven husbands, whatever the basis of those relationships, and the cumulative nature of grief overwhelms me.

Whilst seven life partners may be unusual the experience of multiple bereavements is not. This is the experience of older people and indeed many congregations made up of predominantly older members. It is the experience where people share a life limiting illness or indeed are experiencing some form of disaster or war.

We also know that there is a risk with suicide that it may appear in clusters including within familial groups. A fact that calls for evermore sensitive postvention.

Whilst we have become increasingly more sensitive to the needs of people experiencing grief I feel we have much to learn in order to offer support to those whose experiences of loss are cumulative.

Loving God there is simply nothing that we can do which allows us to step outside that circle of love you have for us. Be with us today, whatever our experience, whatever our expectations for the day. Bring us integrity and growth through learning Bring us solace and healing when we struggle with loss and despair. God of life bring us hope. Amen.

Reflection

I guess one of the biggest challenges for the disciples was the need to 'see' the risen Christ. Hearsay was not enough. Instead, there needed to be sight of the risen Christ. The Corpus Christi was something that needed to be experienced in person. He needed to be seen to be believed – even eating fish to prove it.

In the shadow of Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection Feast fades, children return to school and the normality of our lives begins to return. We return to our daily jobs and routines, which seem a million miles from the celebration of new life at Easter. The idea of seeing the risen Christ seems as far away from us now as the idea did to those first disciples.

Today we reflect the Body of Christ through the Church – the body of believers gathered around the cradle, cross and campfire. But, unlike those disciples, we cannot encounter the risen Christ in the bodily sense, with once-pierced hands reaching out towards us, but we can experience the risen Christ in other ways, both in and out of the Church: through our reading and study of Scripture; through our relationship of prayer and discernment; and through our engagement with the broken, hurt, damaged, remorseful, neglected and ostracised in the world.

As our 'normal' routines return, we can remember that the risen Christ encounters us in many ways, seen and unseen. And yet our Easter experience of the risen Christ gives us the duty to believe and to respond: to go out from our places of worship – our own Jerusalems – and witness to what we have seen and what we know of the promise of the resurrection. For when we do that, we can let others see the risen Christ alive in our lives and in the Church.

*Risen Christ
in the ways that we encounter you,
in scripture, prayer and the other,
help us believe in all that you promise
and inspire us to share your good news
in word and deed. Amen*

St Luke 24: 50 - 53

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Reflection

What a great ending to his story, as Luke tells us Jesus' last journey began at Bethany and ended in heaven. Why Bethany? Clearly, a special place for Jesus, it is thought a community of Galilee folk lived there, home from home for Jesus, as they spoke his dialect, and shared stories of the north. Bethany has been identified as a centre for healing, sufficient distance from the 'holy' city – Simon the Leper lived there. How closely Jesus identified with people struggling with ill-health and handicap, with the terrible poverty and exclusion this caused. An Essene hospice was in Bethany, the last place to rest for pilgrims on their way to the temple, just as Jesus rested there. Profoundly, from Bethany Jesus began his last entry into Jerusalem, so now, his return marks a redemption of that journey of sacrifice and death to hell itself, into a journey of freedom and joy to heaven itself.

One last connection - Jesus' friends lived there, Mary, Martha, Lazarus. I see him looking from a distance at their home, just making sure they were well, before he left this final time. Like many, I struggle with goodbyes, which only become good experiences, when I know those I am leaving will be well, and they can let me go, knowing we are safe in God's hands. A helpful description of heaven, knowing all is well because we are all safe in the hands of God, hands that 'flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered' (Kendrick). At Ascension they come together in Jesus, human, divine, earth and heaven. Luke began his story with everyone praising God, young and old, shepherds and angels! No wonder the story ends with everyone invited to join the praise! But Luke will write again, for what goes up must come down – God has not deserted us, the Holy Spirit is coming!

St Luke 20: 27 - 47

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.' Jesus said to them, 'Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.' Then some of the scribes answered, 'Teacher, you have spoken well.' For they no longer dared to ask him another question. Then he said to them, 'How can they say that the Messiah is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" David thus calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?' In the hearing of all the people he said to the disciples, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

Reflection

Set alongside the challenges from the Chief Priests and Scribes in the text comes this discourse with some Sadducees.

According to Josephus they were a small but influential group many being placed in prominent positions within the Temple structure. Their existence was

The spies had been carefully chosen, people able to seem plausible, to ask questions which looked as though they had confidence in Jesus' teaching whilst at the same time having the intention of turning the adoring crowds against him.

The question seemed simple enough, we might say deceptively simple and the answer was quite clear even if not the one the spies expected. In both the question and the answer are layers of possibilities. There were issues here of political and religious power struggles and like many questions then and now, the important thing was to determine which were the central issues.

In our Statement of Nature Faith and Order we declare "In the things which affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ ". But it isn't as easy as two tick lists headed, loyalty to God and loyalty to Caesar.

There are decisions, priorities and loyalties in there which require us to examine our response to any of the complex issues of our day, homelessness, Universal Credit, violence, to name but a few. If we observe what Jesus did in these circumstances, we find he understood the hidden agenda, and identified the central issue.

In the complex world in which we live, our prayer must be for wisdom to spot the "spies" who will flatter and then undermine us, and for discernment to judge what is at stake in any given situation.

*Compassionate God,
in a world in which it seems as though nothing is simple we pray
for wisdom to recognise the messages we can trust
for discernment to understand the situation
and for commitment to act in accordance with the values of justice and peace
demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

*Lord Jesus, we praise you for
your journey into the fullness of God,
Shares God's presence with us all;
your humanity and divinity are one,
Shares that closeness to God with us all;
your being set free from the struggle of human life
Shares that peace and love with us all.
For you promised – "Lo! I am with you always
even to the very end of time."*

[Thursday 25th April Easter Thursday Foretelling his death](#)

****We loop back to the sections skipped in Holy Week****

The Rev'd Fleur Houston is a retired minister and member of Macclesfield and Bollington URC

St Luke 18: 31 - 43

Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.' But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' Then he shouted, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God.

Reflection

For the third and last time, Jesus spells out to the disciples what they can expect when they reach Jerusalem. He speaks with a deep sense of commitment. It is almost as if he himself were the suffering servant evoked by the prophet Isaiah. He could scarcely be more explicit. He must be crucified before he is glorified as the risen Christ. But the disciples cannot understand. What Jesus says to them will not make sense till after the resurrection. For the moment, uncomprehending, they fade into the background.

And now we have a glimpse of the fulfilment of God's purposes. As Jesus carries on to Jericho, he passes a wayside beggar. We don't know the man's name. He is blind. He is aware of a throng of people going by, senses that something is up, hears someone say: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by". The solemnity of the moment is not lost on him. In a flash of revelation, he cries out to Jesus, hails him as Son of David, and asks not for alms, but for mercy. This is the time he has been waiting for, the time when a Davidic king would bring healing to the blind, the lame and the deaf. Again and again, the blind man calls out. Jesus stops, commands bystanders to bring the man forward, and restores his sight with a word. It is a sign. Through Jesus Christ, God is bringing healing, joy and hope to the world. And the man? he follows Jesus, glorifying God, and all the people sing Hosanna!

As we followers of our risen Lord sit with the beggar, in a world mired in suffering and sin, are we not called to live and speak in such a way as to bring ever nearer God's rule of righteousness and peace? And are we not also called to rejoice at signs of the fulfilment of our hopes?

*Ever living and ever loving God,
Give me grace so to follow in the steps of Jesus
that I may see all things in the light of your purposes.
So may I rejoice today in your worship and find gladness in singing your praises.*

Likewise, we too can mistakenly fall into the fallacy that we have the last word. We desire to go our own way in life. A misinformed response could warp the pilgrim life - the road that Jesus calls us to. It's a journey of tough adventure, but one where we are seeking to follow Him. When we start asserting our own rights, we risk going off route.

We are invited to travel with Jesus, being comforted and guided by the Prince of Peace. He has the ability to up-end any life which asserts the right of individual autonomy. In love, he invites us to take the pilgrim which celebrates journeying in companionship with fellow pilgrims.

*O God, may we remember that we do not have the last word in our affairs.
May we be mindful of the friends and family who journey with us.
May your peace travel with us. Amen.*

Wednesday 1st May Paying Taxes

Val Morrison, Hall Gate, Doncaster. Former Moderator of General Assembly

St Luke 20: 20 - 26

So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor. So they asked him, 'Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, 'Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?' They said, 'The emperor's.' He said to them, 'Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent.

Reflection

They watched him – the "they" being the scribes and chief priests - whilst they sent spies, first to flatter and then to ask questions. Jesus, of course, had another audience, for the people were following this rabbi who promised new ways of living and an end to the misery of occupation and oppression.

insulted and sent away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, "This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours." So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.' When they heard this, they said, 'Heaven forbid!' But he looked at them and said, 'What then does this text mean: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

Reflection

Frank Sinatra is one of the 20th Century's most celebrated artists. Famously, Sinatra popularised the song "My Way" in 1969 which became an anthem for individualism in Western culture:

*I've lived a life that's full
I've traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way*

This is a song for the road, seemingly inverting Jesus' own journey metaphors, asserting the individual's right to self-determination and choice.

Today we find Jesus crashing into such mind-sets. Individual autonomy is nothing new, and we meet Jesus clashing with a group of religious heavies who believe in the right to flex their spiritual muscles as they see fit. Jesus' defense is rooted in his identity as the Son of God, the culmination in a series of prophets God had sent to call the tenants of Israel to account.

The Temple leaders tried to trap Jesus, demonstrating their belief that they would have the last word. Jesus' response - that he is the "cornerstone" which held the ultimate authority - confounded them to plot a murderous response.

Friday 26th April Easter Friday Zaccheus

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is a minister in the Synod of Scotland's Southside Cluster serving churches in Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton.

St Luke 19: 1 - 10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

Reflection

The URC isn't the type of church that dwells overly on sin - though I suspect some of our forebears were more exercised by personal sin than many contemporary Christians are. Some of those who have gone before us would have grumbled if the minister was seen going to a house of a notorious sinner so we shouldn't be too harsh on those in today's passage.

Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus changed his life. This was not only a spiritual experience but a conversion that cost him dear - he gave half his possessions to the poor and paid back four times what he had gained through fraud. Zacchaeus' radical repentance is a response to Jesus' radical refusal to judge.

I wonder what the contemporary equivalent would be. This is more than being radically inclusive, more than singing "All are welcome" more than congratulating ourselves on how progressive we are. Jesus took the risk by going from what was comfortable to what was provocative. He went to Zacchaeus - the chief tax collector of the hated Roman occupiers. Jesus took

the risk of being seen with a collaborator and that risk paid off. What risks are we prepared to take in our lives for the sake of the Kingdom?

*Lord Jesus,
friend of prostitutes and tax collectors,
irritant of the holy,
curse of the self righteous,
bless us with your courage,
drive us out to unlikely places and uncouth people
that we may be heralds of your Gospel.
Amen.*

[Saturday 27th April Easter Saturday The Parable of the 10 Pounds](#)

Alan Yates is the Immediate Past Moderator of General Assembly and an Elder in Trinity URC, High Wycombe.

St Luke 19: 11 - 27

As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. So he said, 'A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, "Do business with these until I come back." But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We do not want this man to rule over us." When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading. The first came forward and said, "Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds." He said to him, "Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities." Then the second came, saying, "Lord, your pound has made five pounds." He said to him, "And you, rule over five cities." Then the other came, saying, "Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow." He said to him, "I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest." He said to the bystanders, "Take the

she NEVER swears and she finds cool words to express her emotions. One of these words is "Sassy", if you don't know what sassy is, the dictionary definition is: "lively, bold, and full of spirit, cheeky".

Now when I read this passage where Jesus is basically calling the Pharisees out, in my mind I imagine him being very sassy, he has had enough of the Pharisees being all letter of the Law but not genuine followers and he isn't going to take their nonsense. The Pharisees realise that Jesus' sassiness has basically backed them into a corner and they won't win either way so they fake an answer which also bites them because Jesus responds with more sassiness and tells them he won't answer their question.

Growing up being cheeky was not an attribute that was praised in my family, but sometimes, you have to be sassy because it is the only way to diffuse situations that are heading towards conflict, I am aware that this can aggravate a situation, but sometimes it's worth taking the risk. As church, I think we sometimes get ourselves worked into knots and conflict when if someone had taken the risk and been sassy the situation may never have become so tense. So I dare you, be Sassy.

*Creator God
It is good to be reminded that you created us to be
People of liveliness, fun and joy.
Give us courage to be cheeky, fun and sassy
To lighten moods and spirits of those we encounter
Recognising that we often do not know what people are going through. Amen.*

[Tuesday 30th April The Parable of the Wicked Tenants](#)

Daniel Harris is an ordinand at Westminster College and Student Minister at St Neots URC.

St Luke 20: 9 - 19

He began to tell the people this parable: 'A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and

Will people who perpetrate evil survive the destruction of their wickedness? I don't know. Can God's passion for justice really be satisfied as well as God's capacity for love? I don't know. For now, I put my trust in God who sees and acts, though not necessarily in the ways I expect.

*Thank you, God,
That in Jesus we encounter you;
Neither vengeful nor neglectful,
But at work to rid this world of wickedness. Amen*

Monday 29th April Questions on Authority
Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, CRCW

St Luke 20: 1 - 7

One day, as he was teaching the people in the temple and telling the good news, the chief priests and the scribes came with the elders and said to him, 'Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?' He answered them, 'I will also ask you a question, and you tell me: Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' They discussed it with one another, saying, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say, "Why did you not believe him?" But if we say, "Of human origin", all the people will stone us; for they are convinced that John was a prophet.' So they answered that they did not know where it came from. Then Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

Reflection

I've recently started watching a YouTuber called Bunny. Bunny has two channels and lots of other social media, and she primarily does the following: makeup tutorials, makeup "swatches", testing of children's toys for value for money/entertainment, unboxing mystery boxes/packages/blind boxes/blind bags...now if I'm talking a language that is just words, I promise you can Google the terms for clarity.

You are probably wondering where we are going and what does a Texan named Bunny have to do with Jesus teaching in the Temple, well it's like this: the first thing that endeared Bunny and her YouTube channels to me was the fact that

pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds." (And they said to him, "Lord, he has ten pounds!") "I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.""

Reflection

When ordaining a new Elder in a local church recently I used this parable as the Gospel reading (the version in Matthew is one of the readings recommended in the URC Worship Book). At first glance, this parable seems to urge us to use our skills, capabilities and experiences to further God's kingdom on earth. This is a useful and often-cited explanation for this parable. The trite saying, 'use it or lose' comes to mind to reinforce the message that we all have God-given gifts and talents the we are duty bound to exploit for God's purposes.

In preparation for the service of ordination and induction I studied all the recommended readings and was struck by a number of recurring themes, such as, humility, service and sheep-tending. Considering these themes gave me a different slant on the parable. While building up our own 'wealth of talent' (for God's purposes, not ours) is important, what seemed even more important (for those in any form of leadership roles) was building up the wealth of talent in the 'flock'. Tend my flock we are told. This parable points out to all Elders, old or new, that we are to use our skills and capabilities to develop and encourage those around us. To enable others to become more talented and more fruitful. For Elders (and other leaders), this parable is not just about developing our God-given skills, it is about developing the wealth of talent in the whole Christian community.

*Lord, we thank you for the wealth of gifts
you have showered on your children, and continue to do so.
We are grateful that we see your servants use these gifts
day by day to further your kingdom.
I pray that through your grace you will continue to inspire all in leadership roles
to nurture those around them, giving them the skills and confidence to do even
more in your name. Amen*

1 O LORD, the God of vengeance,
O righteous God, shine forth!

2 Arise, condemn the haughty,
O Judge of all the earth.

3 How long will evildoers,
O LORD, be jubilant?

4 They pour out wicked boasting;
their words are arrogant.

5 O LORD, they crush your people,
oppress your heritage;

6 The widow, stranger, orphan
they murder in their rage.

7 They say, "God does not notice;
the LORD has closed his eyes."

8 Take heed, you senseless people;
fools, when will you be wise?

9 Do you think the Creator,
who gave mankind the ear
And made the eye for seeing,
can neither see nor hear?

10 Does he who guides the nations
not punish them for wrong?
To him who gives instruction
does knowledge not belong?

11 All human thoughts are futile;
to you, LORD, they are known.

12 You bless those with correction
to whom your law is shown.

13 In troubled times you grant them
relief from their distress,
Until a pit is opened
to punish wickedness.

14 The LORD will not abandon
the folk who are his own;
His heritage, his chosen,
he never will disown.

15 For justice will be founded
once more on righteousness,
And all right-hearted people
approval will express.

16 Who will arise to help me
against the wicked one?
Who will stand up to aid me
when other help has gone?

17 Unless the LORD had helped me,
I'd soon have passed away
To dwell in death's dark silence
far from the light of day.

18 When I said, "LORD, I'm slipping,"
your love came to my aid;

19 Your help gave joy and comfort
when I was so afraid.

20 Can God accept a tyrant
who issues harsh decrees,
And brings upon his subjects
oppressive miseries?

21 Against the righteous people
the evildoers plot;
To execute the guiltless,
such is their wicked thought.

22 But as for me, my refuge
is in the LORD Most High;
God has become my fortress
and on him I rely.

23 God will repay the wicked
the evil they have done;
The LORD our God will surely
destroy them every one.

Reflection

Do you prefer a terrifyingly vengeful God or a pathetically unobservant one?

Evil doers, the Psalmist suggests, rely on God's eyes being closed to the many abuses suffered by the vulnerable, here represented by oppressed and murdered widows, strangers and orphans. The Psalmist, on the other hand, is confident that the LORD will live down to "his" well-known reputation for vengeance: "God will repay the wicked for the evil they have done; the LORD our God will destroy them every one."

Some of the time, perhaps most of the time, I don't want God to destroy anyone, not even evil doers. On other occasions, seeing what some people do to others, my blood boils and I'd lose little sleep if bad things happened to bad people.

My heart is willing but my capacity to exact vengeance is limited, so it's a relief to put it all into someone else's hands. But who will arise to help me against these wicked ones? Will it be the Psalmist's God of vengeance or am I stuck with the evil doers' hands-off, eyes-closed, emotionally detached deity?

It's neither. For me, reading these verses with Christian eyes, God's character is neither neglectful nor vengeful. God is very aware of the deeds of evil doers and the suffering of their victims. And yes, by way of a cross, God has arisen to help them against the wicked ones, not by vengeance but through destroying wickedness itself.