

Sunday Sermon 10 October 2021 - Rev'd David

Trinity 19

Collect

O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you; mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Faithful Lord, whose steadfast love never ceases and whose mercies never come to an end: grant us the grace to trust you and to receive the gifts of your love, new every morning, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Post Communion

Holy and blessed God, you have fed us with the body and blood of your Son and filled us with your Holy Spirit: may we honour you, not only with our lips but in lives dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hebrews 4:12-end

¹² Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Jesus the Great High Priest

¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested^[a] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Mark 10:17-31

The Rich Man

¹⁷ As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother."' ²⁰ He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money^[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is^[a] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.' ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another,^[a] 'Then who can be saved?' ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.'

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' ²⁹ Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,^[a] ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'

Sermon: Sad, Perplexed and Loved!

1. Sad

There are 3 particular responses in the Gospel reading today. The first one the rich man who went away sad or grieving. In the encounter Jesus names a number of the commandments which the rich young man has kept since his youth. Count them up... and you have 6! The rich young man is a good man, and Jesus sees that in him. He must have been so hopeful at this point... eternal life must be on the cards!

So what's the problem? Well, the rich young man had kept what some commentators might call the 6 'horizontal' commandments, the commandments relating to how human beings interact with one another. He's a good man who has loved his neighbour as himself. However, Jesus had seen into his heart and noticed that something was missing... something rather important i.e. the 4 vertical commandments that relate to our relationship with God were missing. No other gods, no idols, don't take the name of God in vain and remember the Sabbath day.

Jesus cuts to the young man's heart and reveals that this young man's god was possessions, status, money, not the Lord our God. The summary of the Law is to 'love the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind and strength.' Deuteronomy 6:5 & Mark 12:30

No wonder the man turned away sad. He must have thought he was spiritually sorted and that he'd got eternal life sussed. Jesus managed to burst that bubble! Having been asked directly by God incarnate to do something, and he couldn't, or rather didn't want to do it! Imagine God asking you something and walking away from him. That would make you sad! His life was without the most important thing... divine love. His problem wasn't loving his neighbour, his problem was loving God as God – for eternal life is a loving communion with the living God.

Dear friends in Christ, we are just as at risk of being sad like that young man. Other things can come between us and the Lord, and our love for him can wane in comparison to our love for other things. What is my 'one thing' or your 'one thing' as you stand before divine love? I didn't have a Sabbath day this last week. Work had become a god above God!

When the Lord is our Shepherd and guide, our sufficiency and our first love... we lack nothing!

2. Perplexed

The second response I want to highlight in the gospel is the disciples... who were perplexed (Mark 10:24). Other translations say amazed or astonished, but this word perplexed has really spoken to me.

Brian Maclaren, in his book Faith after Doubt, says that as Christians we go through stages on our journey of faith. It can begin with simplicity. Everything seems to clear and simple. We rush to Jesus and just like falling in love the relationship may seem so simple and easy!

Then we go into stage 2... complexity. Just like a love relationship we can find ourselves saying, "Hmmm, it's not quite as easy as I first thought!" With our faith we may decide to do a course or

keep a discipline, have more faith, or adhere to a formula trusting that things will all make sense and come into line.”

Then, there's stage 3. This is when things can get really tough, and we might enter the realm of perplexity. This is when doubts emerge; there are certain squares we can't circle in our faith and we struggle. We pray and nothing changes. Bad things happen to good people. What about those difficult Bible passages? Why doesn't God intervene in this or that situation? The church isn't what it should be! Hope and enthusiasm can fade, and doubts arise in our hearts.

Perplexed! Looking at the root of the word perplexed makes a lot of sense to me. (Remember last week I said that the root of the word worry was 'strangle') The etymology of perplexity is 'entangled.' We journey in faith with Jesus, with each other, and through life and things can get so entangled. Perhaps we become entangled by the complexity of the Bible, or entangled by the imperfections of the church, God's people? Perhaps like the Rich Man or as parable of the Sower suggests we are entangled by possessions and the cares of the world? Perhaps we become entangled by sin or an unhealthy relationship to a person, work or money. Listening to the revelations of the Pandora Papers this week there's a lot of entanglement with money! And listening to the revelations of abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in France or the scandals at Hillsong this last week... it feels very entangled.

Many of us may have travelled a certain distance with the Lord but feel very perplexed by where we find ourselves. That is normal!!! The disciples were perplexed many times and when Jesus was crucified - they must have felt in a right old tangle.

But thankfully there is a stage 4 Maclaren mentions, and that is 'Harmony.' A moment or time or state where we find ourselves able to live with or resolve the perplexity and move beyond doubt to new faith, harmony and simplicity. We may then begin a fresh cycle of simplicity, complexity, perplexity and harmony.

If you feel perplexed by doubt, struggle or entanglement, that's okay! You're normal!!! Don't lose heart! As a Christian community we must love and support each other through these times as best we can with good wholesome relationship, and we must not be afraid of taking our perplexity to Jesus, who as Hebrews says, understands what it is to be human (Hebrews 4:14-16).

3. Loved

Finally, the third response in this gospel, comes from Jesus, who looked at the rich young man and his heart... and condemned him? ignored him? Was angry at him? **No, he loved him!** Love never gives up on us when someone is sad or walks away, or if someone is perplexed and entangled. Love may challenge someone to the core of their being, but love will never give up on us or others.

And that is a challenge to us. Whilst we were enemies of God he loved us! Even when he was despised and rejected, God's love continued to flow. It's extraordinary how far and wide and deep the love of God reaches (abyss of divine love and mercy – St Gemma and John Wesley).

If this is how God loves us, so we also ought to love. There are so many whose first love is not God and they are sad, some are enemies of God, and there are those who are perplexed and entangled

in life and faith and doubt. What is our response? Sometimes it may be that we speak truth like Jesus did to the young man, but in love! Sometimes it may be to say nothing and just to be there, present, alongside, in love. Sometimes it may be to pray in love. Sometimes it may be to do a random act of kindness in love. Our challenge, which may cause us grief and perplexity, is to look at others as Jesus looked at that rich young man..., with love! Amen!

An additional message on giving...

I have said on more than one occasion recently that I am very hopeful about our future as a Christian community here. There are some wonderful signs of life, great opportunities to minister the love of God and a committed band of pilgrims willing to follow Jesus and be the church gathered and scattered.

We are called to Live Life Together in the Flow of God's love... loving God, loving each other as a Christian community and loving his world. That commitment involves using our gifts and talents, time and money in His name.

Much of our ministry and mission in the Parish is FREE..., but it is costly! The vicar, our buildings, our work with Children, Youth, and families, wellbeing, pastoral care is largely paid for by our Christian giving. Today, I want to thank you for all your financial giving and generosity, but also invite you to consider afresh your financial commitment to God's church in this place.

I believe that God has given us what we'll need... some of it is in other people's pockets and some of it is in our pockets, bank accounts, investments, bricks and mortar. Please think about all your giving, including your financial giving to the church!!! CHALLENGE HERE! What has God given you, and what are you prepared to give back to him?

The former Bishop of Sheffield Jack Nicholls said "Our generosity is measured not by what we give, but by what we have left when we have given."

Talking about giving money and contributing to God's work in this place may make some of us switch off. Perhaps it may make some of us sad like that rich young man. Why does Jesus have to bring money and possessions into things? It was all going so well until that point!