

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, 13 October 2024, Year B, Proper 20

Readings: Amos 5.6-7,10-15; Psalm 90.12-17; Hebrews 4.12-16; Mark 10.17-31

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

A sermon app I listen to regularly entitled **Sermon Brainwave** (no. 986) had one of the commentators state concerning today's challenging and unsettling Gospel,

"I am writing a sermon on this text. One of the challenges I am facing is avoiding rescuing people from the text. Of course it is hard to go into the pulpit and preach with conviction knowing that I am going to go home to my stuff. It is hard to preach a sermon when you are not sure you are listening yourself. This text has a power so let the text do the hard work letting it be what it is and saying what it has to say!"

So how to proceed? I could and should invite us all now to read the text for ourselves and think for a few moments about how this Gospel affects us individually. How does the interaction between Jesus and the man challenge us? How does it unsettle us?? What is it calling us to become? What is it challenging us to do?

As some if not most of us are already aware, today marks the launch of our 2024 Stewardship campaign against the backdrop of the specific challenges we are facing here at Christ Church and more generally against the backdrop of the present economic and political realities. The concept of stewardship is a general one. These are its principles: considered and ordered giving. These are the categories: time, talent and treasure. And our stewardship as God's people – for that is what we have become through the gift of faith based on the reconciling work of God in Christ, God's people – our stewardship as we follow Christ will include the poor. In the introduction of the baptism service there is a phrase that we can miss if we are not careful '... and God gives us a new dignity'. (1 Timothy 2.2, CW baptism service introduction) God gives us a new dignity in Christ. Let us not downplay this new dignity, but learn to value it and always give thanks for it in tangible ways.

A little later the Treasurer will speak to us about our financial situation, our financial needs and will put down a financial challenge that will startle, aligning itself to some extent with today's unsettling gospel.

One of the lessons surely of today's gospel is to be careful for what you ask. The man who came to Jesus got more than he bargained for as he moves initially from a place of self-assuredness (Here I am!) to a place of shock and grief (Here I take leave!). He comes to Jesus confident. He leaves heartbroken. At the outset of this episode we don't know the man is rich. We are simply told this man runs up to Jesus and kneels before him. Given what we learn later we may assume that this man is most likely well groomed and well dressed. By his outward appearance he is set apart from most of the people around, coming to Jesus as someone he recognises as a Jewish Teacher, who may have the answer to his burning question, "What must I do to **inherit** eternal life?" Is the suggestion here that the wealth he has acquired inherited? We don't know, but it could be. More importantly Jesus questions the man about calling Him good and saying, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." And if you are keeping the Commandments you should know this. The man is probably a little deflated by Jesus' initial response. This the first blow he has to absorb. Jesus proceeds by turning to the second half of the commandments listing the things we are to do and refrain from. Even though the man has absorbed the first blow he will have momentarily felt emboldened as his response makes clear, "Teacher" (no more "*good*" Teacher) "I have kept all these from my youth!" What will Jesus' response be? It is first a response not of more words, but rather of love captured in Jesus' demeanour. "Jesus looking at him loved him and said..."

This is one of those beautiful moments in the New Testament and there are a number of them. May we savour this one today. "Jesus looking at him loved him and said..." Make it our own. God looks on us first in love, but will still have things to say to us that we will find hard to hear and deeply unsettling, even troubling. Jesus then in love

delivers the second blow. He answers the man who has come to him with his question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” by saying that he is lacking in one thing. Jesus speaks of lacking one thing and yet he asks the man to do three things. What are those three things? Sell what you own, give to the poor, then, come follow me, as I make my way to Jerusalem.

Let’s rewind. A picture of this man, this specific man, is crystallising in my mind. The man inherited his wealth. His parents are dead. There are no further obligations. We don’t know any of this for sure. But let us assume momentarily that the above is a good sketch of this man. He still has a lot to learn as the reading makes clear. His life is not yet set. And like many teenagers and young adults he is asking a question, a fundamental question. It is “What must I *do* (not believe) to inherit eternal life.” He has kept the commandments. He is loved. He has the potential of being a disciple – Jesus has told him how. In following Jesus he will gain a greater prize (possession) the gift of eternal life, which no amount of wealth can buy.

What is that we truly value? This is the question that is being asked of all of us here gathered, who know themselves to be God’s people through what God in Christ has gifted us. Paul writes, “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:19) In like manner a Christian stewardship campaign like the one we here at Christ Church are embarked upon is asking us a question, a fundamental question. What do we value? Are we ready and willing to give and give sacrificially in the service of that which we value? In the coming weeks we will revisit the question of what we value, I am sure. Do we, the many yous and I, love our possessions more than we love God, the God who looks on us in love, who sends His only Son into the world that he might become for us the substitute for our sin by overcoming all that separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Are we willing to put our possessions and our wealth in the service of God’s Church, a Church that is called to be present to the poor, speaking when necessary on their behalf or if not

speaking on their behalf empowering them, the poor not simply by clothing, sheltering and feeding, although that is already a great deal, but by equipping them with the skills required so that they can take hold of their lives and learn to speak for themselves? There is no doubt that the world would be a poorer place without Christians and communities like ours. Do we value “unser Christsein”? Can we put a price on it? Do we value this little community? What is its worth? There is a financial challenge. Will we sell possessions to meet it? We are back to the unsettling character of this Gospel passage. Unsettling for us now, unsettling back then for the disciples who ask, Who can possibly measure up? And we hear Jesus tell them and us: Humanly speaking, it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. “Jesus looking at him loved him and said...” later we will sing, “Now is eternal, if in Christ we stand!” **Amen.**