



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

15th Sunday after Trinity - 25th September 2022

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 572117 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

We are still asking people to be sensible and sensitive . Mask wearing is optional. Respect people's space. Washing hands is a good idea. Wine offered (for those wishing it). Dipping is not recommended.

~ Services with Social Distancing ~

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am ~ St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

St Wendreda's Sundays 11am

Prayer, Collect, for this week

O God of justice, hear our cry and save us. Make us heed your word to the prophets; rouse us to the demand of the gospel and impel us to carry it out. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, and for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

God of Abraham, Moses and the prophets, your covenant binds us as sisters and brothers: help us to overcome the scandal of poverty, the fixed chasm of indifference and to recognize you in the wounded poor; through Jesus Christ, the Builder of Bridges. Amen.

Old Testament Jeremiah 32 v1-3a & 6-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

Gospel of Luke 16 v19-31

Jesus told this parable to those among the Pharisees who loved money: '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."

Meditation

At the time of Jesus the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus was a radical reversal parable. It was widely assumed that wealth signified someone who was blessed by God. The wealthier they were, the more blessed. Conversely, those who were poor and/or ill (they often went together) were cursed. These ideas have resurfaced in the last decade and are sometimes called the prosperity gospel. In Jesus' time there was also the importance of decent burial for 'good death'. The rich man was buried, and we are left to assume that Lazarus was not. It would therefore have come as a great surprise to the original audiences to discover that, after death, the rich man was cursed and Lazarus was blessed. This is hinted at even at the beginning of the parable, where the rich man remains unnamed throughout whilst the poor man is named. The invisibility and extent of the poverty of Lazarus is exaggerated; he longs for the bread, but seems to be behind even the dogs, who add insult to injury by licking his sores making him doubly unclean. The bread, by the way, is not that which is carelessly dropped, but rather bread that people would wipe their greasy hands on (no napkins!) and then throw deliberately down.

Abraham is named; the father of the chosen people and nation. In Jesus' day many Jews believed that no descendant of Abraham could be lost, so it is to his father that the rich man appeals. Abraham's loyal servant who was entrusted with important tasks was named Eliezer, which means "he who God helps" and Lazarus is just a familiar form of the same name, so perhaps in the parable we see that Lazarus has been sent on the important task to see if the rich man would notice him in life and respond appropriately. Eliezer was sent to Sodom to test their hospitality, and found that the crime of Sodom was 'pride, gluttony, arrogance, complacency...they never helped the poor and needy... that is why I have swept them away' The crime of the rich man was found, by his reaction to Lazarus, to be the same, and so the rich man is 'swept away' from his kin to a place of punishment.

The parable and Jesus assume that the scriptures read in the synagogue give ample instruction as to how the poor should be treated, but the rich man knows that his brothers are deaf to this plea as he was, so he asks for a miracle to warn them. Father Abraham replies that 'even if someone rises from the dead' it will be no more effective. The parable asks its listeners to consider whether they too, however unconsciously, are making the same kind of request, Jesus in real life refuses the request like Abraham in the story. When it is a matter of what kind of person I am to be, there is no substitute for my own decision. Only I can find and respond to God. No one can do it for me.

So Jesus turns a soothing bit of escapism for the poor ('you'll get even some day') into a description of the challenge of life for everyone. The test of life is to be open-eyed to what is there, and responsive. The alternative is the irrevocable and tragic failure of human life. The heart of the matter is the stance to life I choose, and my making real use of the word of God to enlighten that choice.

The parable presents an unusual model of life after death within the Bible. The usual model is the expectation that, after death, those who have died await judgement at the end time and then are raised. The parable has the judgement made immediately upon death and the reward or punishment allotted straight away. It is also interesting to note that rather than the popular Christian notion of the good going to heaven (above earth) and the evil going to hell (below earth), both Lazarus and the rich man are in the same place with a chasm between them, albeit a chasm that can no longer be crossed. Also for some it is significant that it is Abraham not God who presides here.

Perhaps this is the key to show us that Jesus, in this story, did not want to speak about the after-life. It is just the backdrop to a familiar story that he adapts for his own purpose; the furniture of a familiar set. Recognising this, Jesus' story hinges on two main decisions. There is the rich man's decision to be only interested in his pleasures. As a result he couldn't even see the beggar at his gate. The other decision (possibly proposed as an excuse for the first) is the one expected of the rich man's brothers: they would not listen to God's word to them. The rich man assumes they will make the same decision as his. He knows all about people with comfortable lives or large incomes not listening to God, not seeing the world through God's eyes despite what they have heard. There could be a person outside your gate, crippled, starving, homeless or wounded, and not even realise they were there.

Real listening to God means being prepared to see things as they are. His word enables us to see those in need. If we don't listen we remain in an unreal world spun from our own imagination – we aren't living like human beings at all. Eventually, as in Jesus' parable, there is an unbridgeable gap between what we have made of ourselves and what we would like to be. Jesus' story begins by showing us two people with a gate between them, and that makes you half expect one or other will go through the gate to the other. By the end of the story the gate has been replaced by an unbridgeable chasm.

The parable tells us that selfishness kills us as human beings, but reminds us of the cure, opening ourselves to the reality around us. It is true that some of my fellows seem unlikely people through whom I can experience God, Lazarus didn't qualify to the rich man, yet we must try to see the world around us as it really is, and listening prayerfully will help us see through God's eyes, and the time to start is now.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

Lord, Jesus Christ we thank you for all benefits you have won for us.
for all the pains and insults you have borne for us.
Most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
May we know you more clearly, love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

*Lord, when I am hungry, give me someone to feed;
when I am thirsty, give water for their thirst;
Lord, when I am sad, give me someone to lift from sorrow;
when burdens weigh upon me,
lay upon my shoulders the burdens of my fellows.
When I stand greatly in need of tenderness,
give me someone who yearns for love.
May Your Will be my bread, Your Grace my strength,
Your love my resting place; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Today God has touched you with his love
and given you a place among his people
God promises to be with you in joy and in sorrow,
to be your guide in life, and to bring you safely to heaven.
In Baptism God invites you on a life-long journey.
Together with all God's people you must explore the way of Jesus
and grow in friendship with God,
in love for his people, and in serving others.

*May the living Christ bless you through the fellowship of his people,
granting you, as a member of his body,
support, encouragement, guidance and inspiration.
May you give and receive, love and be loved,
actively contributing to the life and witness of the Church,
through the service you offer, the worship you give
and commitment you show, in word and deed.*

*The Lord grant you, this day and always, a clear vision, a living hope and a constant faith, that you
may live and work faithfully, to His glory. Amen.*