

Readings and Sermon 19th Sunday after Trinity

Collect Prayer

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.

FIRST READING Amos 5.6-7, 10-15 A reading from the book of Amos Seek the Lord and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it. Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate. Therefore the

prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

SECOND READING Hebrews 4.12-end A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 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. 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. 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. 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 as we are, yet without sin. 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.

Gospel Mark 10.17-31

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?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 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; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. 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!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 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, 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. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Sermon Reader Mike Turner

When I sat down to study today's selected readings in preparation for this service, I began thinking, mmm - it's that time of year again.

No, I wasn't thinking about the harvest season and which harvest hymns to choose without raising too many hackles; it wasn't because the autumn evenings seem to be drawing in more quickly than usual; or even the possibility of more rain clouds appearing above us - heaven knows we here in Lincolnshire have waited long enough.

What caused my thinking was that in the past couple of weeks we have been wading through the annual round of political party conferences, where one of the favourite old chestnuts is the plan

to take away what the rich have (and what is more worrying for us, what the not so rich have) and supposedly give it to the poor. Redistribution of wealth I think it's called in polite circles but there are other terms for it. And of course there are other factions who try to limit the damage to the rich while juggling figures to give some illusion of improving the lot of the less better off - and those who promise the earth but really have no idea of how it will be paid for.

And the news this week about the opening of Pandora's box with the secretive property deals of some of the most wealthy possibly made today's readings a little more topical.

Our gospel reading today is about a man who is likely to be called a 'fat cat', for he is often referred to as the rich man, and it tells of his desire to attain eternal life. We're not told how he obtained his wealth, but I think that we have to assume that it was by good business practice and due diligence or perhaps an inheritance. By his own admission he had kept all of God's commandments fully, and I'm sure Jesus recognised the honesty of the man's answers. We are told that the man had many possessions, which might have been in the form of parcels of land, houses, stocks and shares, a whole host of things but what they were really doesn't matter. He was obviously keeping his possessions safe, guarding them against those who would take

them from him, and probably making his investments grow for the future. Nothing wrong with that, as many would agree during our current national and international financial circumstances. But reading between the lines it appears that his concerns over his wealth were now ruling his life – he was always too busy with his worldly affairs and only had time to pay lip service to his faith, although he knew in his heart that this wasn't right, if he wanted to be sure of eternal life.

Well, says Jesus, the answer to your problem is really simple. Get rid of all your possessions, everything. Sell them, give the money to the poor, redistribute it – and then concentrate on following me. For only then will you achieve your goal of attaining eternal life.

What may have seemed simple to Jesus, was not at all simple to the rich man. Was part of his difficulty that he had never known poverty and was terrified of the thought of having nothing, of losing his luxuries; or had he once been poor and knew what lay in store in how society would treat him – I wonder? Were the poor still being treated as they were in the days of Amos? Giving up everything is not easy, particularly your prized possessions or your comfort. Could you honestly say goodbye to all yours?

Over the course of history since the time of Jesus there have been many cases of wealthy philanthropists disposing of much, or some, of their wealth to benefit those who were not so fortunate. How wonderful those actions have been, yet I don't know about you, but I am hard put to name many who, having great wealth, have given it all up, yes every last penny. As I reflect on this story I'm beginning to understand that this isn't just about the rich man and his wealth or his possessions. While we may not consider ourselves rich in financial terms, we certainly are in the freedoms we enjoy, the love of family and friends, the life that we think of as normal, and the gift of God's grace brought to us through the sacrifice of Jesus. This last treasure is one we often guard closely, as closely as the rich man guarded his possessions – we protect it so closely that not even those in the greatest need of it get a chance to share the salvation that we have been promised. Perhaps we keep it to ourselves because we don't want **those** kinds of people sharing it; and although we perceive ourselves to be spiritually rich, we are in fact spiritually poorer for it. Aren't we forgetting that it is only by sharing our treasure here that we will gain the treasure that is waiting for us in heaven? Let me leave you with some words based on a prayer by one rich man who did give up everything, I'm sure you know his name:

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.