

St Marc, Grenoble  
Sunday 18th September (Trinity 14)  
1 Timothy 2: 1 - 7  
Luke 16: 1 - 13  
**'God or Wealth?'**

Good Morning, both those of you here in church and those joining us on Zoom; you are all very welcome. **Let's Pray.**

Sometimes, when I see the Sunday readings, I want to keep my head down and hide; today is one of those days!! I've wrestled with these two readings.

What did you make of them? I've already had several questions about the Gospel reading. So please share: What did you think?? What was hard to understand? What was challenging? What do YOU think they may be saying to us today? ... Thank you

Well, here goes! - Did you notice a theme in these readings? There's certainly something about integrity – or lack of it; also some thoughts on how we should handle money and pray and care for other people.

Let's tackle the reading from Paul's letter to Timothy first: Paul is writing to Timothy, a young leader in the 'growing' Christian Church. Teaching him how to be a Pastor; and his advice is still valuable for all pastors, even old ones like me, today!

Paul's first instruction is: 'Pray!' Pray every day, Pray every way, Pray for everyone.

- Do you do that *every day*??

Pray especially for Rulers and Governments - How much they need that, in this 21st century: for Wisdom, Integrity and Grace all of which seem in such short supply. (How relevant that is, right now in the UK, with a new King coming to the throne, and a new government lurching into action in these very difficult times. That's slipped into the background this week, as the focus was, understandably, on the Royal Family.)

Paul says 'pray for Governments to rule well', so we can quietly get on with living our lives simply and in humble contemplation; listening to God for His wisdom too?? He goes on to encourage Timothy, and his flock, to pray, 'Not shaking fists at enemies, but raising Holy Hands to God' - What a powerful picture that is for us too.

Prayer must be the foundation of all our lives and our faith; Paul makes it clear we should not only pray for those around us, those we love; but even more, we should pray for those (Good and Bad) who lead our nations - raising our Holy Hands to God.

God is the supreme ruler, The King of Kings, and in praying faithfully we will invoke His rule of peace, love and Integrity.

Let's move on to the Gospel reading; and, right at the beginning, it's important to say Jesus doesn't have any problem with people earning money honestly and plenty of it!

What we do with our money – especially if we have plenty of it, is much more important; the way we spend our money and how we share it with others.

Money must not get in the way of our relationships, firstly with God or, secondly, with each other. Paul says: 'The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil' Peterson translates it: 'Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble.' (1 Timothy 6:10)

It's vital we do not allow money to dominate or control our lives and our actions. – The Gospel reading says, 'No worker can serve two bosses ... you can't serve God and the bank. 'You should try and use your money to provide what you need to serve God better; and to help people you should be serving, as a good neighbour.'

It says in Luke 10: 27 '... Love the Lord your God with *everything you have* and love your neighbour as well as you do yourself.' Throughout the Old Testament, God challenged His people to care for the poor and needy and throughout the Old Testament, in a typically human way, the people of Israel ignored God's instructions and were surprised - as a direct result, they got their cum-uppance!!

God pointed out, throughout the Old Testament, that He didn't want vast sacrifices of burnt offerings; He wants more than anything else that His people are just, fair, benevolent and honest in their dealings with Him, and with others who are worse off.

For example: Micah 6: 8 reads: He's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously.

So, what do we make of the rich man's spendthrift manager? The rich man was told that the manager was wasting his property, and running up huge expense bills. So, he called him in and said: 'What's this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, (I want your accounts audited) you cannot be my manager any longer.' It sounds like a bank manager who was caught, with his hands in the till!

The next bit is more difficult to understand – the manager, about to be fired, goes around reducing peoples' bills; apparently giving away even more of his master's

money – in order to make sure he still had friends, who'd care for him, when he was out of work; because he'd looked after them first; helping them reduce their debts.

We read: "Now here's a surprise: The master praised the crooked manager! - Why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this

regard than law-abiding citizens. They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits.' They know how to make ends meet.

I've read quite a lot about this passage; the scholars don't all agree (always a challenge!) but it's suggested that, if we delve deeper into the parable, and what it would have meant on a human level in the first century; it would be obvious that the master in the story was, himself, acting illicitly – extracting usury, taking interest unfairly from his clients, which was clearly against God's law. It's suggested in telling the story Jesus was exposing some of the illicit practices of the supposedly 'squeaky clean' Pharisees, who were in fact acting against God's law.

Deuteronomy 23: 19-20 gives the background to this: 'Don't charge interest to your kinsmen on any loan; not for money or food or clothing or anything else that could earn interest. You may charge foreigners interest, but you may not charge your brothers interest. That way GOD, your God, will bless all the work that you take up and the land that you are entering to possess.

The parable suggests the manager was removing the 'illegal' interest from the debts of the clients. Varying rates of interest were commonly levied on different items being loaned like corn or oil; so it's suggested that's why the amounts of reduction varied.

Jesus was referring back to God's law here, saying: 'Don't use your money to make immoral gains, use it to make friends and draw people closer to God through their relationship with you.' It's rather deep and hard to understand, but Jesus is explaining ways of using earthly wealth to advance God's heavenly kingdom.

The more difficult part is: Jesus was saying: 'I want you to be smart in the same way— **but for what is right.** Using every adversity to stimulate you and help you survive creatively, by concentrating on the bare essentials. That way you'll live, working hard, and making the most of life, truly serving in God's kingdom; not just passively keeping your head down and hoping to get by on good behaviour.'

Now, as I close, my challenge for you to chew over this week is – 'How can I use what I have: money, job, house, garden – whatever; to draw the people close to and around me, gently into the love of God's Kingdom??' **Let's pray**

Come Holy Spirit, guide us and inspire us to use whatever we have, however little it may be, for your glory and your delight – For Jesus sake **Amen**