

St Marc, Grenoble

Sunday 25th September 2022

1 Timothy 6: 6 - 19

Luke 16: 19 - 31

'Run for your Life'

Good Morning, whether you're here in Church, or joining on Zoom - you are very welcome. **Let's Pray**

So let me ask you, what were your thoughts, doubts, challenges or delights in today's readings? Please share with us Thank you

The parable about the rich, flashy man and the homeless guy, Lazarus, covered in sores, is well known and easy to relate to, yet very often misunderstood.

How did you feel as it was read? Did it send a little shiver down your spine, as it did down mine? What is our salvation based on? Belief and trust in God or the way we behave in life? Is it wrong in God's eyes to be wealthy?

This story usually attracts most attention to the part about the rich man crying out from roasting in hell. Non-Christian people often suggest it portrays a heartless God. But there's much more in the story than that - the other side of the coin; God's promise of joy in the lap of Abraham - I wonder why that description is used here??

Throughout history, or at least, throughout the four thousand or so years since Moses; God has urged His people to stand firm on issues of social justice and human compassion.

But, for just a moment, let's focus on the sad situation of the rich man - and his brothers - obviously far too full of their own importance in this world to pay attention to their eternal salvation. While they were living their lavish life, it seems they had no need or thought for our heavenly Father's wonderful act of redemption and forgiveness, which will affect their eternal life.

I wonder if any of you, like me, buy things on the Internet, or on Amazon, and when you've purchased something once, you're inundated with SPAM – or email circulars – forever trying to persuade you to buy something else. Words like: 'An unforgettable special offer – for one day only! Buy today before it's too late.'

How do you respond to offers like that?

I usually bin them without even reading them; but, of course, it is just possible I may be missing something really good!

In exactly the same way, we have the choice to do the same with the redemption and forgiveness, which Jesus offers us - we can consign His, 'once for all' special offer to the bin (The sin bin??) like the rich guy and his brothers in the parable. But then, of course, we'll be turning down the best special offer in the world.

We must remember, Jesus told us quite clearly the first commandment is this: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength AND the second is Love your neighbour as yourself.'

It seems if we love God, we also have a duty to love those around us - His other children! For me, that's often not quite as easy! Loving God is straightforward, but some of His other children can be quite difficult to get on with, as I first discovered working with the alcoholics who used to gather outside our church in Cambridge!

Does the way we respond to each other have any bearing on the salvation God offers us??

Let's be clear, it is not a sin to be rich, or well off; but having wealth, however little, gives us additional responsibilities as Christians. We're called to share what we have – indeed we're called to share everything we have, with those around us – including poor beggars, who like Lazarus, sit at the door waiting for scraps, or alms.

We don't see many beggars around our church (although there are one or two), But, in two or three of my past jobs, quite a lot of homeless people frequently drifted into our church, hoping we'd give them help; or at least, listen to their tales of woe.

It was the same when I worked with the Salvation Army both in the UK, and in Ukraine, where I volunteered twenty years or more ago. People often think Salvation Army Officers are soft, and have hearts of gold, and will never turn anyone away.

Actually, in my experience, Salvation Army officers are some of the toughest people I know; and they usually establish very clear ground-rules for any help they offer – their depth of care and compassion is amazing – but their number one priority is to share the love of Jesus, and His offer of redemption with all the people they meet.

It's important to take on board that the Christian faith isn't just a cosy belief in a God who's a soft touch, or an easy pushover. God expects us to make a real commitment to serving Him; and, yes, there are firm ground-rules.

God doesn't frown on success or wealth. But He does encourage us to make the most of the opportunities he gives us; as Christians. He wants us to share everything we have – including the joy of our faith *and* the material possessions we're blessed with, with those around us who have less than us, and who need to be able to see the power of God's love poured out and being shared joyfully with them.

Even more importantly, we need to make a commitment to our faith, not just sitting on the fence waiting to be stirred into action by some messenger from the dead. We mustn't be like the rich man in the story and his brothers; who ignored all the warnings and opportunities until it was too late.

It will be too late to share our faith, or accept God's offer of redemption, from beyond the grave – we need to seize the opportunities we have now - before it's too late!

Paul's letter to Timothy, the young leader of a young Christian church, has a similar theme - Paul says to Timothy 'These are the things I want you to teach and preach'

A devout life does bring wealth, a different kind of wealth - it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. It's pointless trying to fool God, He's known us since before we were born. There's a reminder - we came into the world naked (we didn't come with our own little bag of cash!) and we will depart in the same way.

Paul says, anyone who is only interested in money and wealth will self-destruct in no time. And, listen to this - I mentioned it last week, and it needs repeating: 'Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble' but there's more to add - Paul says: 'Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after' (That is, for eternity!).

Paul warns Timothy: 'Run for your life from all this. Pursue a righteous life - a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, courtesy. Seize the eternal life, the life you were called to, the life you so fervently embraced'. Paul was writing to Timothy - but his letter is equally important for us! Later he writes: 'Keep this command to the letter, don't slack off.' Why?? Because our Master - our Saviour, Jesus is on His way.'

Paul closes by saying: 'Tell those who are rich in this world's wealth, to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage. To do good, to be rich in helping others and to be extravagantly generous... If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life. Did you notice? Paul was saying exactly the same as Jesus said in His parable.

So, our challenge this week is to Seize our opportunities while we can, before it's too late. Today is the beginning of the C of E's 'Generosity Week'; but, as the website reminds us; 'We're called to be generous 365 days a year' So for me 'Generosity Week' is simply: The beginning of a new outlook on our Christian life!

Let's Pray: Lord help us always to be generous; not just with our money but also in sharing the Good News of your redeeming love - with everyone we meet ...