

SERMON, 31 JULY 2022 – Col 3.1-11, Luke 12.13-21

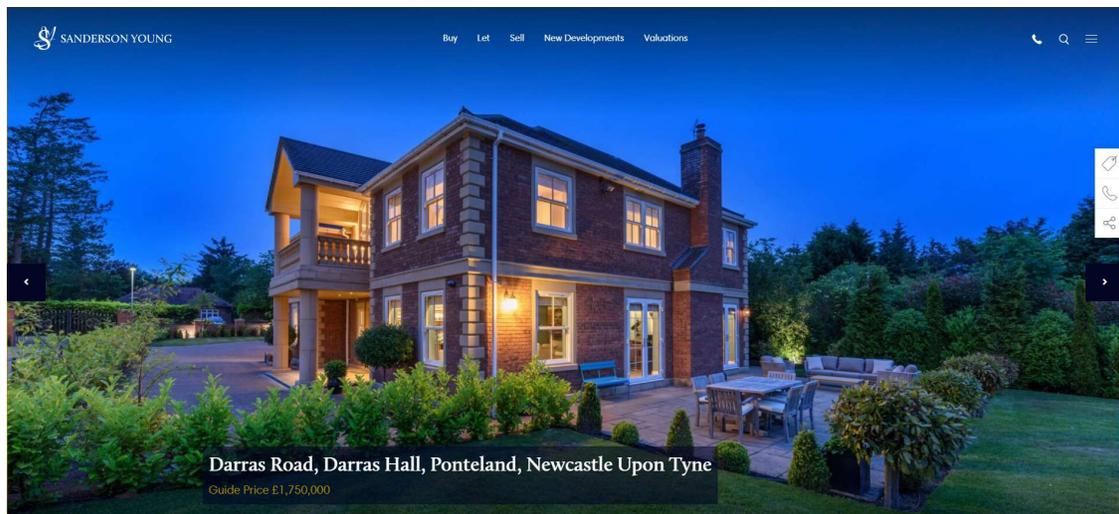


In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, that’s made me feel better. The Sunday just before I turn sixty, and the reading reminds me of death: “this very night your life is being demanded of you.” I’m feeling a bit got at by religion at the moment – we had a day trip to Worksop on Friday, yes, I know, second prize two days in Worksop – and we went to lunchtime Mass in the stunning Priory Church. They are very much the High end of the Church of England, you won’t find a woman priest there, and in the very Catholic worship we prayed the Hail Mary on several occasions – “pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death.”



Before I make too many jokes about it, it does give you pause when you google “life expectancy Worksop” and find that the average life expectancy for a woman in that town is eight years less than for the average for a woman living in England. Poverty is a very real factor in the length of life that people in this country can expect, and how you live “life in all its fullness” (Jesus’s promise to us in John 10.10), does depend on where you live and what resources you have and on the economy round about you. “Levelling up” needs to be more than a slogan.



After a trip to Worksop, you do wonder if a story about building bigger barns is relevant. My last parish of Ponteland, had a huge estate called Darras Hall. It had been built as a garden village, small houses on large plots. In more recent years, the small houses had been demolished, and we had huge houses being built on the plots. When I say “huge”, let’s just say, the houses on Darras make Quarndon look average. I dared to make one of my funny comments about building bigger barns referring to Darras Hall – and one member of the congregation was furious with me afterwards. I am glad to say that one of my churchwardens, who also lived on Darras, stood up for me and agreed there were many similarities. I expect they are still building bigger barns on Darras – and they build them in Allestree and Darley Abbey too. There may be good reasons – if it was our house, I have no doubt my wife would have built several library extensions by now – but there also has to be a sense of perspective.



I can’t help thinking that at the moment quite a few of us are regretting our huge houses and wondering how on earth we are going to keep warm this winter – and that is a huge worry. Many of my fellow clergy are frightened about how they are going to make their family income stretch to keeping their homes warm – and it is being pointed out that if the Church of England as a whole had invested in solar panels and insulation and more efficient heating systems over

the last couple of decades, they would have lessened the problem people are facing now. There are churches in areas of poverty who are making plans to be have warmth banks this winter – rooms which are heated during the day, where people can come to find warmth, friendship and a hot drink, places where kids can come after school, rather than go home to flats and houses that are cold.



Yet, contrary to the Gospel, those who build bigger barns, those who are able to build bigger barns, usually seem to do very well out of it. A report written a year and a half ago says that Chief Executives of FTSE 100 companies are paid a median average of £3.6million a year, which works out at 115 times the average salary of a full-time UK worker which is £31,461 (*source Guardian 060121*) – and the World Inequalities Report published at the end of last year shows that the wealth of billionaires across this world rose by £3 trillion during Covid. 52% of the world's income goes to the top 10% of the people. The poorest half of the global population owns 2% of the world's wealth.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59565690> It is the poorest who find their life comes to an end, the poorest who die of starvation – the average life expectancy in the African country of Chad is only 53 years.

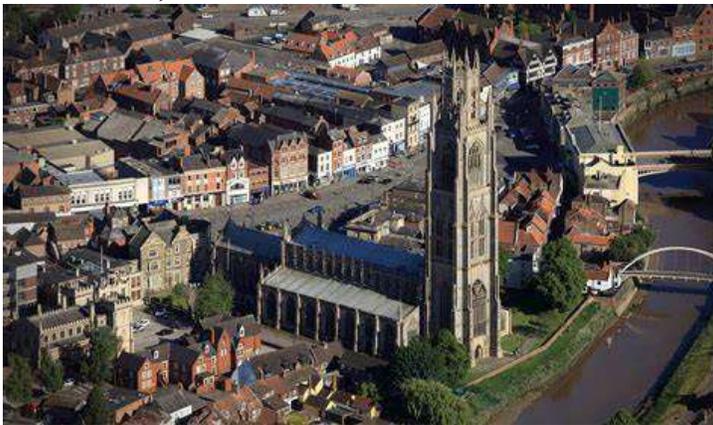


No doubt one of the attractions of the Christian faith in the poorest parts of the world is that it gives you a vision for this life, and a vision for the life to come. If you believe in heaven, in the fullness of life for eternity, surrounded, made whole, by the love of God – then that will give you an amazing purpose to get you through a difficult life here on this earth and give you something so much better to look forward to.



I'm sure that is one of the reasons why our churches are not as full now as they used to be. In the days when life in a mill, in a mine, on the land, was incredibly tough – in the days when sickness and pain were part of everyone's life – in the days when every family would have children buried in the churchyard – Christian faith, faith in something better, faith in a heaven to come, must have been an incentive. And when you come out of a difficult, drab, dangerous life, and you come into a place of beauty, and you taken to another plain – that is a taste of heaven. For some it was the High Churches of the industrial towns and the working class estates – in church you had beauty and incense and ritual. For others it was the hymns of the non-conformist chapels, singing away the pain and struggle of life, finding a taste of heaven.

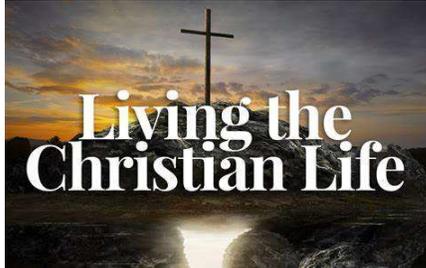
Life is much more comfortable for us – and thank God that it is – so it is more of a challenge to bring people to a taste of heaven, when actually the world, their world, is OK.



I do believe that being there for death is important – even though fewer come to us when they have a death to deal with. When there is a tragedy, like the murder of Lilia in Boston, folk will turn to the church – so we pray for church members at St Botolphs, and other churches in that town, who will be coping with so much grief and pain and anger this weekend. I wish though that more who come in time of death, come for a funeral, would think there is something here, I want

to be part of this – it is frustrating when they don't – but that doesn't stop us showing love and concern.

I do believe that friendship is important. How we develop that friendship into faith, that's harder, but we don't stop trying.



I believe that how we live together, and pray together, and worship together – all of that is important. Paul tells us all the things we shouldn't do – and we have a world where anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language and downright lies, do seem to triumph. We certainly seem to have a politics which, at first sight, is based on all of those. So Christians have to stand up against the anger, the abuse, the lies – wherever we find it. Christians also have to believe that human beings are capable of many wonderful things, and have to shout from the roof tops that there is goodness and joy and love and many wonderful things going on.



I've been negative about Worksop and its Priory – but yesterday morning was obviously a volunteer morning, a good number of people doing all those jobs which a church and a churchyard needs. And those people welcomed us, and had their church open to show us, and turned the lights for us to see Saxon head (photo on the zoom service). And those people worshipped with us, and waved at us during the Peace, and thanked us for coming. Across the road, the park and the flower gardens were immaculate. In the town centre the lass in Costa could not have been more helpful with doors and disabled loos and all the practicalities of life. So it may not be a wealthy town, a town of my sort of people, but it was a positive experience to visit.



Yesterday I took a wedding in Mugginton, and it was a very a nice wedding, a very posh wedding. Lots of accountants and financial people, everyone in morning suits. And with them I shared the gospel of Jesus Christ, a call to love and celebrate, and work together for community.

Our Gospel speaks to everyone. To a chap in the crowd in Palestine who wasn't happy with his legacy, to the church in Colossae in modern day Turkey, to Worskop and Mugginton, and Allestree and Darley Abbey.

The psalmist got it right:

Hear this, all you peoples;
 give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
 both low and high,
 rich and poor together.
 My mouth shall speak wisdom; understanding, love, God

The psalmist was right three thousand years ago, and his words still speak to us – and the world in the 21st century. Amen.

Peter Barham, 30 July 2022