

SERMON, 25 SEPTEMBER 2022 – 1 TIM 6.6-19, LUKE 16.19-end

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

It is probably a good thing that I am not feeling 100%, as for me the only response to the parable of Dives and Lazarus is to look at Friday's economic statement and to feel that 2000 years after Jesus told his story, no one in power seems to be listening. I am too tired to put my anger into words. Bishop Philip, the Bishop of Burnley, one of the poorest parts of the Church of England, commented "What we have heard reminds me of the savage budgets of the early 1980s which did inter-generational harm and from which many working class communities have never recovered. Will we never learn? Trickle down benefits only the rich." The Children's Society, the charity we do Christingle for year in and year out, have said that what is needed is, and I quote, "targeted support for children ... We need investment in a system that works for children and struggling families in the long-term" – we didn't see that on Friday, indeed we saw the opposite of that.

God has told us how to serve, how, as human beings, we are called to care for all human beings. He tells us in the gospels, he tells us in the writings of Paul and the other figures of the New Testament, he tells us in the words of the Old Testament. We didn't use the words of Psalm 146, the psalm set for today, but the words are not just some beautiful bit of language we leave it to choirs to sing – they are a manifesto for Godly living. Even when we put it in the words of the Prayer Book – because I'm me and I love the Prayer Book –

Blessed is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help \*  
 and whose hope is in the Lord his God;  
 Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is \*  
 who keepeth his promise for ever.  
 Who helpeth them to right that suffer wrong \*  
 who feedeth the hungry.  
 The Lord looseth men out of prison \*  
 the Lord giveth sight to the blind.  
 The Lord helpeth them that are fallen \*  
 the Lord careth for the righteous.  
 The Lord careth for the strangers; he defendeth the fatherless and widow \*  
 as for the way of the ungodly, he turneth it upside down.  
 The Lord thy God, O Sion, shall be King for evermore \*  
 and throughout all generations.

How much more do we need? This is what the Lord does, and he uses his people in his work.

On Monday we said goodbye to someone special. As the Archbishop reminded us

“In 1953 the Queen began her Coronation with silent prayer, just there at the High Altar. Her allegiance to God was given before any person gave allegiance to her. Her service to so many people in this nation, the Commonwealth and the world, had its foundation in her following Christ – God himself – who said that he “came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

People of loving service are rare in any walk of life. Leaders of loving service are still rarer. But in all cases those who serve will be loved and remembered when those who cling to power and privileges are long forgotten.

The grief of this day – felt not only by the late Queen’s family but all round the nation, Commonwealth and the world – arises from her abundant life and loving service, now gone from us.

She was joyful, present to so many, touching a multitude of lives.”

She touched our lives, and we seek to follow Christ, just as she did.

I know I am blessed because, to quote the psalmist again, I have the God of Jacob for my help, and even when I feel blurrhh, God is with me. And I try and hang on to that.

But I read the reading from 1 Timothy, the first verse “we brought nothing into the world, and we take nothing out, the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

O great, the passage I have used twice this week as I have walked into church – on Monday in front of Dorothy’s coffin, on Thursday in front of Iris’s. And I know I’m going to get better, and everything will be fine – but it doesn’t always feel like that. And yet, even when life is tough, I know I am surrounded by love. Both funerals were hard work, Iris’s especially, because I knew her, and even though she – and her family – have a wonderful faith – no one likes to say farewell to a friend. We finished here, went down to the Crematorium, did the committal, and I went outside to wait for the family – who were listening to the final music. I was shattered and I wobbled. Rachel, the funeral director from the Coop, put out a hand to steady me, put an arm round me, and told me in no

uncertain terms to sit down and rest. There is something wonderful when the undertaker is the one looking after you. That's what friends are for.

But it was only when reading this passage again, that I noticed we don't start with "we bought nothing in ..." – we actually start with "there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment".

So let's be people of godliness – people who pray, people who worship, people who read their bibles, people who have a belief and a knowledge that we walk with God, working with him to build a better world. You don't need deep theology, or a prayer life to rival Mother Julian – but you need to feel the reality of God in your life. That might be the beauty of the world, the love of your friends, the conversations with the kids or grandkids that don't actually mention God, but you still know that they are loved and blessed by him. It will be the sharing of the resources that we have got – because we are all blessed, we are all rich, we all have more than we need. It will be joining with others to build a better world, and feeling love and solidarity as we fight together – interesting that the RSPB and the National Trust and the Wildlife trusts have all started to mobilise their members to fight against the planning changes that were also announced on Friday, planning changes that will take away so many of the protections that the natural world needs. No one is fighting alone.

And contentment is not just saying "everything's fine, we'll be OK" – contentment is knowing that, yes, we are held in God's love, and we will be OK – and together we, God's people, will make that a reality. We will battle the evil, we will fight the darkness, we will share light with others. That is the privilege of being God's people. We are blessed, and we must share our blessings with others. Amen.

Peter Barham  
24 September 2022