

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 11th August 2019
Trinity 8 YrC

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12.32-40)

This has got to be one of the most difficult biblical passages to swallow. It is one that many preachers try to steer clear of and I readily admit I was tempted to head for the hills and pick another subject.

We all have responsibilities other than ourselves. Family, careers; we need a roof over our heads, food on the table, clothes on our backs. So what can Jesus possibly mean when he tells us, through his disciples, to sell our possessions and give alms to those in need? Ah, of course, he was preparing his disciples for their part in his ministry in an historical context that such an approach would work. You know, they were used to itinerant preachers in those days, people would know to offer food and drink and shelter to them so this can't possibly apply to me. If this is the case, then none of the rest of Jesus' teaching should apply to us either. We can't pick and choose which bits we are prepared to listen to and which we ignore.

Ok, so is this charge to a specific type of follower, not to all his disciples, just those who are called to preach? After all we have those who in this day give up everything for a life of prayer or preaching. They aren't me, I'm not called to live the life of a community or a cleric, so I'm let off the hook; aren't I?

This holds more water as an argument. But there is no evidence this was teaching for a select few. Some will respond more heartily than others but isn't this something to do with how we live our faith. We come back to the charges Jesus places upon us; the beatitudes, the sermon on the mount, the blessing and woes of Luke's gospel; the ten commandments, the great commandment. Nope we still should make sense of this command for ourselves. What does it mean to sell your possessions and give alms?

Like much of Jesus' teaching we shouldn't take out a single phrase and put everything on that, rather we should look at the whole picture and ask, "what is Jesus trying to teach us?" In this passage there are three key phrases: sell all you possess and give alms; where your treasure is, there your heart will be also; be dressed for action and your lamps lit.

Jesus is challenging us on the character and nature of our faith. Jesus' words put into stark reality what is required of us if we are to follow God. In the example of Abram we see a man of faith who has done as God has asked. He has left the safety of his homeland and travelled to the land God is to give to him and his ancestors. A huge thing to do in those early days of civilisation and the beginning of the end of the nomadic life. Having taken up God's call, placed God at the centre of his decision-making Abram is asking God what is in it for him. He is now old and childless, yet God keeps saying he will be the father of many nations. Abram, I suspect

out of frustration and fear challenges God. Yet in his challenge we are shown what human responses will be if they are not centred on God. All along Abram has done as God wanted; in this time of trial, when he is uncertain of what the future will hold Abram demands of God the fulfilment of God's promise. Thankfully, this God does.

How do we put our faith in God? By shoring our lives up with things, possession and money we don't need? By falling in to the 'me first' trap that Abram did? What's in it for me? What can God give me? Why doesn't God give me what I want? We don't like being vulnerable and defenceless; we don't like not knowing. Yet trusting in God can feel that way. And here we are, being asked to trust in God. Sell all your possessions and give alms...who will look after us?

That's not the point though is it? The point is about putting God in the centre of our lives, about trusting in God and living a God centred life; one where decisions are not based on my needs, my aims and my desires but upon those of others, those of God. That's what Abram was doing. His treasure was in heaven in that his heart was in God.

Where do you keep your treasures? That is, what is valuable to you. And what makes them valuable? Why are they important? During my holidays I was taken to a shop full of stuff. I discovered it is a chain of stores, full of stuff. It specialised in selling fripperies and nonsense. Things to make your home sparkle but things which intrinsically had no value. I'm not knocking these suppliers and the many others like them. Their goods can make your home sparkle, comfortable and welcome. The question is, is that all there is to life? Is this our treasure or is there more? Jesus is saying there is more, there is the love of God that changes the world for ever, if only we would open our hearts and minds to his word and truth.

If we do this, if we redress our lives and receive Jesus then we will be like those servants with who the master is happy and satisfied. We will be considered righteous as was Abram. As we gather at this altar we are declaring that desire to receive God a fresh in our lives and we are saying we will go out and live God centred lives. As we gather today for this great feast of Jesus resurrection allow Jesus into your hearts and renew your relationship with God so that your treasures will be in heaven where your heart will be also.