

Your storehouse, or God's storehouse?

Fr Michael 14/10/18

What do I do, and what do most of the Presidents do after bowing at the altar when we process into the service? *Reverence the altar!*

Why do we do this? *Because this is where Christ will be made present in bread and wine transformed into flesh and blood. Sacramental!*

But what do we do with the Gospel Book after the reading of the Word? *We put it on the candle chest, out of view. Is this reverencing the Word? Is this making word and sacrament of equal importance?*

Well, I love reading the Bible and Bible study. Now I'm not saying this so as to brag, but in all honesty I can say, that I started to read the Bible seriously at the age of twelve. When I did confirmation classes with my Vicar aged twelve, he suggested that we all begin using the Bible Reading Fellowship Daily Readings - and I have done that ever since - 47 years of using Bible notes, at night, so the last thing I read is a portion of the Bible. I have encouraged others to do the same over the years. My mother has done it, some of those I've prepared for confirmation over the last 8 years have done it and Neil uses the same Bible notes. We often chat about what we have read, whether we agree with the commentary and whether we are finding it easy or useful.

Now when I began to study Theology, some sixteen years ago, there were some at my church who worried that I would be put off - that I might lose my faith, because they had heard of others who after dissecting scripture, after in-depth scholarly arguing over authenticity and so on, had lost their faith. But, I can honestly say that wasn't the case with me - you will be glad to hear! I love all of the proving and disproving - all of the biblical criticism and historical analysis.

Today we have the story of the rich man in Mark, or the rich young man in Matthew, or the ruler in Luke, which all point to the name we often give to this character 'the rich young ruler.' All three of the synoptic gospels have this story. This the scholars will tell us is sure evidence that this story was told by Jesus. All three, Matthew, Mark and Luke - the synoptics, because they can be placed side by side and compared, mention a camel and a needle and the initial question by the man but beyond that there are differences in the way that the story is written and with different details.

So Mark's telling is our Gospel for today and we can say that Jesus did say most of these words. They were important to him, and he hoped they would be important to the rich young man and also we can say, 'to us.' Jesus wanted to teach how we get to the kingdom, his kingdom - and storing up treasure here on earth or storing it in

heaven is the teaching he hoped to put across. So the story is not so much about how much wealth you have, but about how you view the wealth and how you use it. You can be rich and go to heaven, and you can be poor and get to heaven - but the needle and camel suggest it is a lot easier if you are poor! Now heaven is part of the problem, because Jesus was announcing heaven on earth was coming - his kingdom was beginning here and now on earth - it wasn't just a thing in the future it was also the present. Jesus was going to make the world a new place - a new creation and the rich man needed to examine his life and think hard about priorities if he wanted a future with Jesus. Jesus wanted idols and covetousness to be sent packing. The rich man had made money his first love, his idol and Jesus knew that he wanted more of the same - so he tells the man to give everything to the poor! Jesus always seems to quote the extreme - but that's in order to get his radical message across. It's true that if we sold everything we had - then we would be the poor ones - so Jesus meant something a bit different. Jesus wanted the man to turn his thinking around and so his life around. Get your priorities right, put God and neighbour first was what Jesus wanted, but he did it in a very challenging way. Jesus' new movement was radical, it turned the world upside down, as the song says - and it needed the man and therefore it needs us to examine our priorities. Amos says something of the same - seek the Lord and live. If you have built fine houses, barns to fill, vats to fill and vineyards a plenty its all very well but you may have trampled on the poor - you may not be hating evil and liking good - you may be being unjust.

So the Bible is great isn't it! The parallels between gospels, between old testament prophets and letters from Paul are fantastic to discover. Paul says the Word is a two edged sword - and yes it cuts right through our sordid lives, our idols and love of worldly things and it puts us right with God if we read the word in time and season. Having a discipline to read the Bible and to engage with it and all its complexities is wonderful, but to pray about what we read so that it changes our lives is even better. Bishop Sarah, spoke about her prayer life this week when some of us heard her at Christ the Saviour. Again she emphasised the discipline of prayer and how life enhancing and life changing that is.

So be of good cheer - read the Bible and pray - self examine, and in the age to come you will have eternal life and that means life in abundance.

Amen.