

Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, St. Mary's Wimbledon, Sunday 7th August, 2016, Trinity 11.

It is not only Guides and Scouts with their Motto '*Be Prepared*', who have to live in readiness for any event that may befall them. Jesus exhorts all his followers to be alert, to be awake, and to be ready.

Our Gospel reading this week starts with Jesus referring again to the right use of earthly possessions. Although members of some communities in the New Testament did hold all their "goods" in common others remained in their own homes. Thus they were able to provide hospitality to Jesus and his disciples as they travelled around proclaiming the Gospel. Leon Morris in his commentary on Luke's Gospel suggests that:

"... Trust in riches prevents trust in God.... The heart and the treasure go together. Anyone's heart, the concentration of their energies and interest, is always with their treasure, i.e. the things they value most..."

It is getting the balance right that is difficult as we have to be responsible and good stewards of our own resources. This does not mean that we should not be ambitious and responsible to enable us to earn sufficient money to care for our families or to progress in our career. It is the love of riches or money for their own sake above all else that is wrong.

We read in the first letter of Timothy 6: 11:

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."

There is urgency in Jesus' message in today's Gospel passage. Jesus knows that he is going to face crucifixion and death in Jerusalem. He wants his disciples to be ready to face the difficulties and hardships that are ahead. The readiness that he wants is the readiness that anyone should be in when they start a journey. Tom Wright suggests:

... "That the people who had been properly dressed and ready for action were the Israelites getting ready for the sudden Exodus from Egypt"... (Exodus 12:11).

This is the type of readiness that Jesus is talking about.

Once again Jesus refers to the kingdom of God.

"...Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom..." (Luke 12:32).

Jesus was asking his hearers to have a different perspective on life, to work for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. He was not just concerned about the heavenly riches that would be obtained in heaven.

Tom Wright in his commentary on Luke's Gospel puts it rather well:

"...What matters is that the kingdom of God is bringing the values and the priorities of God himself to bear on the greed and the anxiety of the world. Those who welcome Jesus and his kingdom-message must learn to abandon the latter and live by the former..."

This kingdom is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. What better treasure can we have than the saving power of Jesus? We received the blessings of the kingdom when our hearts are united with Jesus.

What does this mean for us in today's turbulent world? We may be worried and anxious at about all sorts of things. If we rely on an income from investments we may be worried about the level of interest rates as they go even lower. We may have a fear of terrorists following the terrible atrocities that we have witnessed in recent weeks in France, Germany, the United States, and the continued devastation in Syria. We may fear illness, old age, incapacity, unemployment. Our worries can be endless.

We are called to have the faith that we read about in our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. The first line of which is:

"...Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen....".
(Hebrews 11: 1)

This is the faith that sustained Abraham and his descendants and that sustained the prophets. The promises made in the Old Testament came to fulfilment in the person of Jesus the Christ. St Augustine wrote:

"... The New Testament lies hidden in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New"...

We are called as Christians to carry on our everyday lives with the assurance that we are strengthened by the power and grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is only the Christian faith that gives its followers a living relationship with the Son of God. We believe in a Creator God, are redeemed by his Son our Lord Jesus Christ and are empower by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore we are given the strength we need for each day. It does not mean that our burdens or worries will disappear but we are given help to bear them.

We have help and support too through our membership of a worshipping Christian fellowship. What a lot of pastoral support is provided by members of this congregation to one another. You do not need to have an official title or role to show loving support and care for other people.

We read in Matthew's Gospel 11:28-29:

"...Come to me, all you that all weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light...."

However, having rested, we have to be alert and ready to face the challenges that life brings us.

I think the words of one of the lively songs that we shall be singing at our Family Service today are an encouraging way to end this sermon:

*"Be bold, be strong
for the Lord your God is with you,
Be bold be strong
for the Lord your God is with you,
I am not afraid,
I am not dismayed
Because I'm walking in faith and victory*

*Come on and walk in faith and victory
for the Lord your God with you. “*

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