

**ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE**  
**SUNDAY 10<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2020**

**INTRODUCTION**

I suspect that *United States Secretary of Defence* Donald Rumsfeld will always be best remembered for his speech making reference to “unknown unknowns” – the things we do not know that we don't know, our blindspots. It is part of the human condition to have blindspots. In today's Gospel, Jesus meets someone who thinks they want to live freely, but is trapped by their blindspot about money.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that God's Spirit working through His Word is what is needed to help us to see our blindspots – for everyone has them. But rather than cause us anxiety, this should be a source of comfort, because in Jesus we have a High Priest who understands our weaknesses, having faced all of the same testings we do.

Pause for a moment to rest in the fact that, when God looks at you (as He is doing right now), He looks with compassion and understanding, and knows – and loves – you completely.

[Keep a moment's silence.]

**A SONG OF PRAISE**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!  
O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation!  
All you who hear, now to His altar draw near;  
Join in profound adoration.

Praise to the Lord, let us offer our gifts at his altar;  
Let not our sins and transgressions now cause us to falter.  
Christ the High Priest bids us all join in his feast,  
Gathered with him at the altar.

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper our work and defend us;  
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend us;  
Ponder anew all the Almighty can do,  
He who with love will befriend us.

Praise to the Lord, oh, let all that is in me adore Him!  
All that has life and breath, come now in praises before Him;  
Let the Amen sound from His people again,  
Now as we worship before Him.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Lord, speak to us  
**That we may hear your word.**  
Move among us  
**That we may behold your glory.**  
Receive our prayers  
**That we may learn to trust you.**

## **TURNING TO GOD**

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden,  
To ask his forgiveness and peace.

We confess to you, our selfishness and lack of love:  
fill us with your Spirit.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

We confess to you our fear and failure in living and sharing  
our faith:  
fill us with your Spirit.  
Christ, have mercy.  
**Christ, have mercy.**

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:  
fill us with your Spirit.  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

May the God of love  
bring us back to himself,  
forgive us our sins,  
and assure us of his eternal love  
In Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **NEW TESTAMENT READING**

### **Hebrews 4:12-16 (New Living Translation)**

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Thanks be to God.

## **GOSPEL READING**

### **Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV)**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the

kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

This is the Gospel of the Lord  
**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **REFLECTION (by Andy Todd)**

How do you catch a monkey?

Well, there are probably any number of ways in theory, but here is a fairly humane one. Take a large hollow item, like a box, or an empty coconut; chain it to a stake, put a small hole in it, and place something inside which a monkey will find

irresistible – a prize of a banana, or a pile of rice. The monkey's hand will fit through the hole, but its fist, clenched around the prize, will not. The monkey is trapped: not by anything physical, but because it cannot let go of the "treasure".

When the rich man (the other Gospels tell us he is a young man from an influential family – hence the "Rich Young Ruler") comes and kneels before Jesus, and asks him why he feels like there is something big missing in his life, Jesus soon recognises that money has become a monkey trap for him. As long as he clings to it, unable to let go, he cannot be free. So Jesus tells him to give it all away and become part of his community. The man walks away, puzzled and sad, his hand still firmly wrapped around his treasure.

One of the first questions most people have when they hear the story is: "Does this mean that all Christians are expected to give up everything they own?" (Which, I need scarcely point out, seems like rather a tall order!)

From the fact that the Gospel accounts make it clear that a number of Jesus' followers had access to money with which they helped to support Jesus' work, I don't think that can be the case. Instead, I think Jesus with characteristic insight saw that, for this young man, money was the root problem – or rather, his attachment to money. So important was it to him, so dependent was he on it for his sense of security and perhaps identity, that rather than him owning the money, his

money now owned him. He was a slave, and the only door to freedom was through letting go of it completely.

So no, I don't think you and should infer that "Go and sell all your possessions" is part of Jesus' instructions to all of us. (Although, let us not forget the profound power of the examples of some who have done just that: think of St Francis of Assisi, whose memory the Church celebrated only last week.)

But that is not to say that money is not likely to be a monkey trap for us all to some extent. It has been said that the last part of any person to be converted is their wallet or purse. I strongly suspect that each and every one of us has something of that rich young ruler inside. Each one of us in some way struggles to give money its proper place in our lives – as Jesus puts it elsewhere, to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

The Bible as a whole has more to say about money/possessions/economics than just about any other subject. Much of it is about the way in which poor and otherwise vulnerable people are treated by oppressive economic systems. A really important part of any journey towards Christian maturity is about learning to live in ways which seek to redress some of those wrongs. It is a large part of what charities like Christian Aid stand for (and I single them out only because we as a Church support them regularly).

Rather than focus on that, however, I want to invite you to think for a few moments about your own relationship as an individual or family with money. And I want to do that by suggesting 3 short principles which I have tried – imperfectly – to use to guide my own relationship to money.

The first is: Treat all you have as God's, on loan to you. "All things come from you, and of your own do we give you." Those are the words we use each time we bless the Communion bread and wine and offer them plus our gifts of money to God. When you think of what is in your wallet, or in your bank account – whose is it? Yours, or God's, entrusted to you to steward on his behalf? That is why the principle of "first to the Lord" is so important. Sort out what you are going to give to God's work before you start wondering whether to get have that extra cappuccino and cake, or new cushion covers or whatever. Treat all you have as God's, on loan to you.

Second, giving is not about piling on guilt, but about finding freedom from the monkey trap. Giving does cost us, and can feel fairly painful – King David said, "I will not give to God what cost me nothing" – but in my experience it usually brings a sense of real peace. So please believe me when I say nothing I say here is intended to make you feel guilty. "The Lord loves a cheerful giver", and giving is a key way by which God can bring joy to our hearts.

Thirdly, giving is a marathon, not a sprint. I am as prone as the next person to the temptation to get swept up in the good

cause of a moment, to give generously to that, but to neglect the really important work of regular giving week-in, week-out. Now, I know that some people's financial circumstances means that regular may look very different for them compared to someone who gets a monthly pay-cheque or pension. But, just as any good relationship needs sustained work, so getting right your relationship with money requires regular work over time, not the occasional burst of enthusiasm – good as those can be. Take time every so often to check you are still happy with what you are giving. And, again as in any relationship, good intentions do not count for very much.

So, three principles: treat all you have as God's first; seek the joy in giving freely; and keep at it for the long-haul.

But I know many people – understandably – want some specific guidance. So here are 3 suggestions:

1. The official suggestion is that we give 5% of net income to the Church, and 5% to other charities. (Net income is broadly what arrives in your bank account after tax – not what is left after you have bought everything else you need or want!)
2. If at all possible, give by means of regular, planned giving, by Standing Order or ideally through the Parish Giving Scheme (just ask if you are not familiar with this).
3. When you are planning what happens after you die, please do consider leaving a legacy. Again, just ask if you want to know more.

There, three principles, and three specific suggestions. And that is all I am going to say on the subject – other than to underline that at the end of the day, this is not about placing burdens on you or anyone else. It is about recognising the presence in each of us of something of that Rich Young Ruler, a part held captive by the monkey trap of money, and helping us to let go, and so find the freedom and joy which are God's gifts to the generous heart.

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

In response to what we have heard, let us affirm our trust and faith in God:

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

### **PRAYERS**

Let us lay down our own agendas  
and seek the face of God  
and his will for the church and for the world.

We pray for all who are seeking God  
and for the nurturing process in this parish.  
We pray for opportunities to share God's love  
and draw others to meet him.  
*Silence....*

Your will be done:  
**on earth as in heaven.**

We pray for all who are fighting against evil  
for goodness, truth and justice,  
both those who make the world news  
and those whose battles are known only to God.  
We pray for our country and its leaders  
that this nation may seek God.  
*Silence....*

Your will be done:  
**on earth as in heaven.**

We pray that wealth and comfort may not divert us from searching out the heart of God; that we may hear God's challenging and gladly respond to him; that our homes and communities may sparkle with God's glory.

*Silence....*

Your will be done:  
**on earth as in heaven.**

We pray for the disillusioned and depressed and all who have lost their way in life; we pray for those corrupted by evil, trained in hatred and twisted by bitterness. We pray for the transforming of these lives.

*Silence....*

Your will be done:  
**on earth as in heaven.**

We pray for all who are sick, isolated, troubled or vulnerable, and from our own church family we pray especially for Susie Cottrill, Bryan Plester, Brenda Hulland, Paul Burston, David New, Anna Clements, and Adrina and Alan Price. In a moment now we hold before you those on our own hearts, who are in need of prayer.

*Silence....*

Your will be done:  
**on earth as in heaven.**

We pray for those whose earthly life has come to an end, among them Lynda Hawkins, and for those who mourn them.

And we remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversaries fall at this time: Frank Hemmings, Beryl Plester, Horace Jarrett, Mary Trow-Poole, Doris Hutton, Libby Alexander, Reg Hill and Yvonne Mousley

May they rest in the peace and joy of heaven through the mercy of God

*Silence....*

Your will be done:  
**on earth as in heaven.**

With thankful hearts we recall the times when God has rescued and forgiven us, leading us deeper into his friendship.

Merciful Father,  
**Accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**

**WORDS FOR REFLECTION**

A rich young man came seeking,  
God's kingdom was his aim.  
The law had been his guidebook,  
His life was free from blame.  
But Jesus asked the courage  
To give his wealth away.  
The young man turned in sorrow,  
That price he would not pay.

The rich men's gifts were lavish  
And made for public show.  
The widow's gift was humble  
And only God would know.  
In giving to the Temple,  
Although her coins were small,  
Her gift had so much meaning  
Because she gave her all.

Lord, keep our care for money  
From turning into greed.  
Help us to use it wisely

To meet each other's need.  
For whether poor or wealthy  
We have so much to share,  
And open-hearted giving  
Will show your loving care.

We pray the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily  
bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who  
sin against us.  
Lead us not into  
temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the  
power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

**Our Father, who art in  
heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily  
bread.  
And forgive us our  
trespasses,  
as we forgive those who  
trespass against us.  
And lead us not into  
temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.**



## **SENDING**

**We go into the world  
to walk in God's light,  
to rejoice in God's love  
and to reflect God's glory.**

May the peace of God,  
which passes all understanding,  
keep our hearts and minds  
in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always.  
**Amen.**

Will you come and follow me  
if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know  
and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown,  
will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown  
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide  
if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside  
and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found  
to reshape the world around  
through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true  
when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you  
and never be the same.  
In your company I'll go  
where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow  
in you and you in me.

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