

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2019**  
**Trinity 7 (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Ecclesiastes 1.2,12-14;2.18-23**

**NT: Colossians 3.1-11**

**G: Luke 12.13-21**

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

'Religion, politics, sex- if only money was that easy to talk about.' So goes a current advertisement for Lloyds bank which features a couple sat at a dining table with their faces fixed with that utterly terrifying facial expression worn by people in public places who have 'something they want to talk about'. I don't know which dinner parties Lloyds bankers go to but they sound positively ghastly. To be honest with you, the idea of talking at length about any of those topics over a supper party fills me with existential dread.

Religion- well, as someone who spends most of his time thinking and talking faith I don't think it's unfair for me to swerve that in a more relaxed environment. As for money, well- I used to like an ill advised post supper game of poker as much as the next profligate wastrel but I fear that now that particular avenue of pleasure would be inappropriate for me to stroll down again. Politics is a topic fit only for princes or fools, though in fairness to our parliamentary democracy, it has cut out any confusion by maker the latter into the former. And with regard to sex, well frankly I'd rather talk about death.

Fortunately, we're not at a dinner party but at Church- and so we are free to talk about politics, sex, money and even, perhaps most controversially in the dear old CofE, religion to our hearts' content. Our gospel today has a smattering of all four. Sex has many regrettable ramifications but perhaps the most cursèd of all its consequences is its tendency to produce

families and families, as the Gospel today shows us, argue. In this case, about money, as the young man asks Jesus to arbitrate as to how to divvy up an inheritance. Jesus's answer, about authority, handily ties in politics too. That's three birds with one stone. Three tricky and unpleasant topics rear their ugly heads and that's before we've dealt with anything other than the first two verses of the Gospel reading.

I have, of course, up till now been fairly facetious. It is all too easy to wallow in comfortable cynicism (and I must confess it took a lot for me not to preach solely on our first reading, my favourite passage in the entire Bible- about the vanity of all things)- and to view money, sex, politics and religion as curses. This is not always the case, they are, to many of us, blessings, making our lives more comfortable. But the warning from today's gospel is that they do not make us *too* comfortable- it is a caveat that warns us not to make little gods of these things, these tropes, these earthen vessels- because if we do, we invariably forget God.

What's left is religion and it is that which I would argue is at the very heart of the passage. Jesus brings the issues of sex, money, and politics to a head in asking us how they figure in our relationship with God. For it is that relationship that is at the very heart of religion, at the very heart of our faith, at the very heart of, I would hope, what has brought you to this place today.

A challenge, therefore, is laid before us- a gauntlet thrown down. What is it that we give to God? Well, what God wants is ourselves. Now, our politics, our money, our religion, even our sexual and emotional lives can be, indeed, should be, given over to God but not because they have value in and of themselves. Rather they can be given over, consecrated, because they are adjuncts of us. For it is us that God desires.

Your relationship with God ought to inform you politics, it ought to inform your personal relationships, it ought to inform what you do with your money. In some ways though, these are the easy bits, the real question remains- how does your relationship with God affect your life as a whole. What time do you, do we, give to him? What thoughts, what hopes, what dreams? In the midst of the busyness of it all, can we truly claim that we are, in those terms 'rich to God'? I am very happy to admit that as I read those words they condemn me, challenge me- they may well challenge and condemn you too. That is no reason though to shrink from the challenge- after all, like the young man in the Gospel, we ask God for a lot of things, be they in our financial, emotional, or political lives, or at the messy intersection of all three and, although God is not transactional, rather he is unwarranted grace itself, the challenge still remains- if we really believe he is our source of hope and transformation, how are we reacting in how we live our lives?

There are many different ways to work out what that looks like- we are blessed with volunteers here who give time and effort to this place and its life and to the wider glory of God and in them we have much to be grateful for. But if we are not asking ourselves, as a Church, as families, and as individuals- 'what is it God might want from me'- on a regular basis, then we risk losing falling into the very trap Christ identifies in our Gospel today.

It is not the time of year for Christmas carols- although I did note with some horror that the Atlantic Tower is already advertising its Christmas lunch packages and much of last week's weather wouldn't be out of place in December- but this dynamic between us, our resources, and God, seems best summed up by these words from In the Bleak Midwinter:

'What can I give him, poor as I am,

If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part,

But what I have I give him, give him my heart.'

Jesus tells us that we ought to not store up riches for ourselves but to be rich in our giving towards God. If we start by earnestly offering our hearts to him, for it is that which he desires above all else, and the rest, we are promised, will follow.

'This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

Fr Fergus Butler-Gallie