

**Sunday 11<sup>st</sup> August 2019**  
**Trinity 8 (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Genesis 15.1-6**  
**NT: Hebrews 11.1-3,8-16**  
**G: Luke 12.32-40**

On an average day it has been estimated that we are exposed to somewhere around 4000 advertising messages a day, now I know that will vary depending on how much time we spend on social media or watching television but I think that we will all agree that we are bombarded with marketing messages constantly, whether that be the label on the soap, shampoo or toothpaste we use or the labels on our underwear and clothes. The messages on our breakfast cereals or the advertising hoardings we see on our journeys to and from our homes we cannot escape the messages subliminal or otherwise that we are exposed to and in being subject to those messages and whether we like it or not those messages do have an impact on our lives and the choices that we make as consumers.

The “Rule of Seven” is a guiding marketing principle created by marketing expert Dr. Jeffrey Lant. The rule states that you must contact your buyers a minimum of seven times in an 18-month period in order to convert them sufficiently to make a sale

Whether the specific number of seven is a hard and fast rule is debatable. The essence of the message is simply that your target audience must hear from you consistently over time and in doing so the advertisers are able to effect behaviour change

In our Old Testament and Gospel readings this morning we heard repeated the words of God to Abram and repeated by Jesus to the disciples “Do not be afraid”. The same four words of God-given reassurance, Words of reassurance that were then followed by an important reminder, which in turn invited a response. And that threefold pattern of reassurance, reminder, and response occurring in the story of Abram’s encounter with God, and the teaching of Jesus given to His disciples, can also speak to us on our own journey of faith.

I have read that those 4 words “Do not be afraid” are repeated 365 times in the bible although in my preparation I was not able to confirm that albeit the Bible Gateway website found 78 occasions from Genesis 15:1, this morning’s old testament reading, to the 2nd book of Esdras in the Apocrypha. A repetition of the words far greater than Dr Lant’s rule of 7, yet are we reassured? This morning I want us to consider these 4 words and to think of reassurance, reminder and response.

There is a story of a rock climber who fell off a cliff. As he tumbled down into the deep gorge, he grabbed hold of a branch of a small tree. ‘Help’, he shouted. ‘Is there anyone up there?’ A deep majestic voice from the sky echoed through the gorge. ‘I will help you, my child. But first you must have faith in me.’ ‘All right, all right. I trust you’, answered the man. The voice replied, ‘Let go of the branch’. There was a long pause and the man shouted again, ‘Is there anyone else up there?’

I wonder if Abram felt a bit like that in the first reading we heard from Genesis?! He had responded to God’s call to leave his country and kindred and go to a land that the Lord would show him, and he had been given the amazing promise that in him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). And so, in faith, Abram had set out on a journey into the unknown.

However, at first nothing seemed to happen, and Abram was left wondering whether God’s promises would ever be fulfilled. After all, he and his wife Sarai were now getting older, and there was no sign of a son and heir. So we hear Abram complaining to God about this situation, expressing his questions, doubts and fears. And we’re told that the Lord gave Abram these words of reassurance in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield” (Genesis 15:1).

“Do not be afraid”. God-given reassurance for Abram. And, in this morning’s Gospel reading, we heard how Jesus gave these same words of reassurance to His anxious and fearful

followers. In the face of worry about material possessions, Jesus put His finger on the heart of the problem – the problem of the divided human heart. And those words also highlight how fear – rather than doubt – is the opposite of faith, for fear weakens and can destroy faith. In our own anxious and fearful world, you and I may also find ourselves in a situation where it is hard to see God at work.

Maybe things haven't worked out the way we might have hoped, or else we feel that we're running out of resources to cope. When that happens, we too need to receive those four words of God-given reassurance – “Do not be afraid” - the words that are repeated through the Bible – With God there is no need to fear, and we need look nowhere else for help.

Reassurance. Second, reminder. Abram needed to receive words of reassurance. He also needed a vivid reminder of God's promises to him, promises that God would fulfil in His own good time. So, in the vision the Lord said to him “Your reward shall be very great” (Genesis 15. 1). And “He brought (Abram) outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them’ Then he said to him ‘So shall your descendents be’” (Genesis 15. 5). On a clear starlit night in the desert, Abram was invited to ponder the view and, through that, to receive a vivid reminder of the awesome scale of God's promise to him.

In this morning's Gospel, we also heard how the disciples of Jesus were also given an awesome promise: “It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12. 32). In the face of anxious concern about material possessions, the Lord reminds us – just as He reminded those first followers - that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12. 34). The priceless inheritance and enduring values of God's Kingdom stand in clear contrast to the materialistic values of this transitory age, and God's people need to be aware of the difference in their daily lives.

As Pope Francis recently said, “The encounter with the living Jesus, in the great family that is the church, fills the heart with joy, because it fills it with true life, a profound goodness that

does not pass away or decay. But this experience must face the daily vanity, the poison of emptiness that insinuates itself into our society based on profit and having (things), that deludes people with consumerism”

The challenge remains for us all. Where does our treasure really lie?

Like Abram, and the first followers of Jesus, you and I often need a vivid reminder of the Lord’s promises to us. We need to remember all that God has done for us, all that God is doing for us, and all that God has promised that He will do for us in Jesus Christ, through the gift of His Holy Spirit.

And we have a vivid and a very tangible reminder of this in the sacrament of Holy Communion. As we come to share in bread and wine, to eat and drink in remembrance that Jesus Christ died for us, so we receive afresh the sacramental gift which assures us of the Lord’s presence, and the promise of His glory.

Reassurance. Reminder and response. When he had received those God-given words of reassurance, and the vivid reminder of God’s promises, we’re told that Abram made this response: “He believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15. 6). Abram trusted God, he took the Lord at His Word. That’s why Abram has been held up as an example of faith par excellence, by the writer of the Book of Hebrews. Abram’s response – his ‘yes’ to God, and renewed commitment to continue with the journey of faith on which he had set out - enabled God’s promises to be eventually fulfilled in him and through him. Likewise, Jesus encouraged His disciples to make a response which would show their faith in action. This response would bear faithful witness to the transforming hallmarks of God’s Kingdom – eg by generosity in giving, and by patience and watchfulness in waiting for the Lord’s return.

What, then, might God be asking of us by way of response? How can you and I show in our daily lives that we really do take the Lord at His Word, and that we seek to live as His

Kingdom people? We shall shortly pray those familiar words of the Lord's Prayer "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven." And, we shall be invited to "draw near with faith" and come to receive from the Lord the loving reassurance and vivid reminder that He has given us in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Then, once we have come to receive, we shall be sent out to love and serve the Lord in the Name of Christ. For we too - like those who have gone before us on the journey of faith - are called to show our faith in word and deed, as we seek to live and work to God's praise and glory.

Fr Bill Addy