

Reflections & Prayers for Sunday
11th October 2020



This week we look at Stewardship. During lockdown, many have used their gifts, abilities, and talents God has given by sewing masks, scrubs, or doing shopping for those isolating – all ways of loving our neighbours. Today Tom Venner helps us look at loving God with our money.

Contents

Reading for this Sunday	p. 2
Reflection	p. 3-5
Prayers	p. 6-7
Parish Prayers	p. 8-9

Gospel Reading

Luke 18:18-30

A certain ruler 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 commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.'" He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, 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."

Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Then Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

Reflection from Tom Venner

It is commonly said that one should not speak of religion, politics or money in polite society, but in today's Gospel Jesus is challenging us to think of all three. Perhaps that is why today's reading from Luke's Gospel makes for such difficult reading.

"Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me." says Jesus.

And it gets worse. Faced with a seemingly simple enquiry from a wealthy religious leader eager to secure his place in Heaven, Jesus replies with one of the most memorable phrases in the new testament: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God". Ouch!

On any measure, we in Harpenden are rich. We may not have the monetary wealth of a Gates or a Bezos, but riches we have.

This series of services has sought to inspire and challenge us to think about our wealth and our relationship with God, much as Jesus did with the religious leader. I imagine that many of you, like me, will feel the sadness that that man felt, and will struggle to square it with our own commitments to God.

Through the course of this pandemic, we have seen played out in the media the conflict between on one hand protecting society, and the other protecting the economy. The wellbeing of society, and the generation and retention of wealth is often portrayed as a conflict, a Venn diagram without any overlap in the middle. Perhaps this is an over-simplification. And it is tempting to over-simplify Jesus' words to the rich man too.

Our theme for these services is "Giving in Grace", and I hope you will forgive me for unashamedly using this opportunity to talk about money.

Over recent weeks I hope that all of you will have received this – "My challenge, my church, my choice".

Our ministry as a church is, today, as important as it has ever been. We share an aspiration to grow, and to show God's love to more people in our Parish and beyond. Loneliness, bereavement and sickness permeate our society. The need for the healing power of God's love is great, and it is the mission of each of us to take God's love to whomever needs it.

We have reflected on our wider role in the community, and our commitment to outreach through Project Pheonix and the new Parish centre is tangible.

All of this costs money. £3,200 per week to be exact. For this, much is seen – organs are played, choirs sing, sermons are said. But much goes unseen – the sick are visited, the bereaved comforted, baptism celebrated and bible study completed.

For four of the last five years, without income from legacies our expenditure would have exceeded our income, eroding our precious reserves. Simply put, we are spending beyond our means. And we rely solely on gifts and donations for our income.

This year alone, we expect to spend £30,000 more than we receive in income. So, it is the time for some radical, and perhaps challenging choices. We have seen cathedrals around the country make some difficult decisions, closing schools, disbanding choirs and closing outreach programmes.

We do not want to do that. Instead we want to grow. That means putting a laser like focus on our expenditure and income. To put ourselves on a sustainable financial footing, we must stop these years of deficit. To do that, we must push ourselves to grow our annual income by at least £30,000 per year. That is a lot of money, so let's break it down.

£30,000 equates to 25% increase in giving for the 102 people already give regularly;

or

£30,000 equates £6.10 per week from everyone who would attend the 9:30; or

£30,000 equates to £3.33 per week for everyone on our electoral role.

There are many ways to eat the proverbial elephant. But eat it we must – together we must, because if we don't then we cannot be certain of the future of the ministry of St John's.

So how? – well, there are a number of ways:

If you already give through the Planned Giving Scheme – thank you. I would encourage you to reflect on how much you give, and whether you could afford to give more. Perhaps consider subscribing to the Parish Giving Scheme, which, if you choose, can increase your gift at the rate of inflation.

If you are not already a regular giver, either through the Planned Giving Scheme, a Give as You Earn scheme, or other programme, then please consider it. Like the gas bill, the regular standing order or direct debit takes much of the thinking out of the process. All you need to do is to decide to do it...and we need you to think and pray on that now.

Any gift to St John's is hugely appreciated. Whether it is a one-off gift now, perhaps through our Just Giving Page or even a handbag of used ten pound notes.

If you are unable to give now, then please consider remembering the work of St John's in your will – this is another way to help ensure the future of our church for the next generation.

Finally, whilst "Eat out to help out" has ended, Gift Aid continues. And Rishi Sunak will be happy to top up the donation of any UK taxpayer by 25%.

So, like the camel facing the eye of the needle, or the rich man facing Jesus, the challenge appears impossible. But together we can ensure the future of this church, this congregation and its mission. It takes an act from every one of us – to consider again what we give, challenge ourselves to give more, and commit ourselves anew to the vitally important work of this place.

Prayers

Jesus said, 'Before you offer your gift, go and be reconciled.'

As sisters and brothers in God's family,
we ask our Father for forgiveness.

In a dark and disfigured world
we have not held out the light of life:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

In a hungry and despairing world
we have failed to share our bread:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

In a cold and loveless world
we have kept the love of God to ourselves:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May God who loved the world so much
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins
and make us holy to serve him in the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

God of lavish generosity, help us to remember to count our many blessings
every day and to understand how our faith demands that we give so much
more of all that we have - and all that we are.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We thank God for our church community and our Ministry Team who have worked so hard during the past months to keep us connected, worshipping and serving. We pray for Berkeley, trusting that You will help him through this difficult time and restore him to full health and activity.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for our Government at this exceptionally critical time, trying to balance the competing demands of protecting public health and supporting the economy, as well as negotiating our future relationship with the EU. Help them not to be imprisoned by ideology and personal ambition and to have the humility to work together with those from different perspectives, for the good of all.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

As the weather deteriorates, we pray for all refugees fleeing wars and climate disasters in search of safety and food, undertaking dangerous journeys by land and sea. We think particularly of women and children easily exploited by traffickers and pray that there may be more international cooperation and compassion when responding to these desperate situations.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for all whose health has been very badly affected by the pandemic, not only those suffering from long-term complications from Covid19 itself, but also all those whose treatments have been delayed, leaving them with increased pain and anxiety. Give them courage and hope for each new day. Guide and strengthen all hospital staff as they try to determine their priorities for the winter months.

We hold before God those for whom we have particular concern at this time.....

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Church of the Province of Uganda
Monday	Port Sudan (Sudan); Colombo (Ceylon); Kondoa (Tanzania)
Tuesday	Portsmouth (England); Colorado (The Episcopal Church); Kongor (South Sudan)
Wednesday	Pretoria (Southern Africa); Concepcion (Chile)
Thursday	Puerto Rico (The Episcopal Church); Connecticut (The Episcopal Church); Connor (Ireland)
Friday	Pune (North India); Cork, Cloyne & Ross (Ireland)
Saturday	Qu'Appelle (Canada); Costa Rica (Central America); Kontagora (Nigeria)

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Odell (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Monday	Parish of Pavenham (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Tuesday	Parish of Pertenhall (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Wednesday	Parish of Podington with Farndish (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Thursday	Parish of Ravensden (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Friday	Parish of Riseley (Deanery of Sharnbrook)
Saturday	Parish of Sharnbrook (Deanery of Sharnbrook)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Paddock Wood, Parva Close
Monday	Pendennis Court, Pennycroft
Tuesday	Piggottshill Lane
Wednesday	Pipers Avenue, Poynings Close
Thursday	Prospect Lane, Queens Road
Friday	Ranleigh Walk, Ravenscroft
Saturday	Redbourn Lane, Rowan Way

The Sick:

Berkeley, Emily, Amy Smart, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine Strohm, Hermione, Karen, Sue Holt, Enid Giles, Jo Young, Shambu Mitra and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Barry Williams

On their year's mind:

Reginald Pinney, Robert Perdue, Audrey Reeves, Brian Price, Abigail Baines, Simon Marchant-Jones, Aubrey Gibbard, Denys Horton

Welcome back! Remembrance Sunday 8th November will be extra special this year, as it will be our first Sunday morning back in Church. We will have a Parish Eucharist and Service of Remembrance in Church, 9.30 am. Please remember to wear a mask.

Sunday morning services will continue weekly after that. We are hoping to continue an online service for those who cannot attend Church in person.

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.