

Sermon 18th Sunday after Trinity

What are you doing with what you have been given?

We have heard a lot recently about the dangers of worldly riches and how wealth and position can become gods in our lives. Earthly desires are behind so many sins, distancing us from God, giving us pleasure in our present lives for which we will pay the cost in our eternal life.

The first letter to Timothy is full of largely practical advice on how Christians should relate to each other within the community, a community that consists of slaves, the poor, those who are comfortably off and the wealthy. The line before this reading tells us that godliness should not be viewed as a means of acquiring wealth. This feeling is ever present, God will reward good Christians with an abundance of wealth and good things. The Gospel reading comes up with dire warnings about this. We are asked to remember that the

danger is in the love of money, the love of things in this ephemeral world rather than the love of God which continues throughout eternity. Last week we heard that we cannot serve two gods. Every decision we make about how to spend, how to live should be measured against that costly witness of Jesus.

St Teresa of Avila in the 'Interior Castle' wrote:

"Our Lord asks but two things of us: love for him and love for our neighbour....I think that the most certain sign that we keep these two commandments is that we have genuine love for others. We cannot know whether we love God although there may be strong reasons for thinking so, but there can be no doubt about whether we love our neighbour or no."

Very practical and good advice, advice the rich man could have done with hearing. Did the rich man go to hell simply because he ignored Lazarus starving at his gates? We are not told, but this could be a grave warning for us if that is

so. Thinking back to St Teresa, how do we know that we are loving our neighbours? How can we judge that? Because one thing is certain, we will be judged.

Is it about following rules, like tithing our income both personally and corporately? Is it about using our skills for the good of others? Putting our lives at risk for others? I have been thinking of the numerous aid workers, medical staff and rescue personnel who have lost their lives in Syria recently. Is it about listening, caring, supporting? Welcoming those who are different? Giving hand outs to the beggars on our streets, even if they are not at our gates? Personally I think it is more difficult to know that we are loving our neighbours than St Teresa suggests. How do you think you will be judged on loving your neighbours?

The problem with riches and a comfortable life is that it is so insidious in its influence on our lives, we become dependent on them without realising it, we know others are really struggling in life or death situations, but we are wrapped

in our cocoons, keeping what we have, however much or little to ourselves. For some of us, perhaps it is the continuation of our lives as we know them that has become the god.

Jesus says that his contemporaries, and Israel as a nation, know enough to make the right decisions thus the rich man will not be allowed to come back to life to warn his brothers, after all they have had Moses and the prophets and still not listened or changed their lifestyle.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us of the urgency and seriousness of our life-style choices. We do not know when our opportunity for living a Godly life will run out. As we take stock of how we are living, let us hold onto this vivid picture, a wealthy man who seems to have done nothing particularly evil but who neglected to see the needs of others, even when they lived very close to him.

And so I ask again, 'What are you doing with what you have been given?'

