

## MAKE SURE YOU TAKE IT WITH YOU!

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 26th September 2004

Joel 2: 23-29; Psalm 107: 1 & 33-43; Luke 16: 19-31;

1 Timothy 6: 6-19

Last week's Gospel reading reminded us of Jesus' firm words about whom we serve, because "we cannot serve two masters". It was specifically linked to money: "You cannot serve both God and Money".

There's no doubt that "the good life" has an enormous pull on us. And whilst we want to serve God and be considered God's children, we may sometimes have concerns that serving God just may interfere with our lives.

Today's Gospel passage focussed on the well-known story Jesus told whilst teaching, simply called "the rich man and Lazarus", but my sermon focus today is on the NT reading from the first letter of Timothy. It includes some well-known phrases regarding wealth, and also continues the theme of "whom we serve" from last week's Gospel passage.

I'm sure we've all heard the phrase "You can't take it with you", either in reference to the fact that when you die, you can't take your wealth with you, no matter how small or large it may be... or suggesting you spend it now and enjoy it where and while you can! (Don't waste it by leaving it all to the kids!)

I want to turn that phrase around, suggesting something quite different - so I've entitled this sermon "**Make SURE you take it with you!**" - the meaning of which I trust will become apparent.

Today's NT passage tells us:

"We brought nothing into this world and we take nothing out of it"; & "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil"

The first of those is often included in the scripture sentences recited at the start of the funeral service from An Anglican Prayer Book. It is a useful reminder of fact, which also implies our humble status before God as creatures both at birth, and at death.

From the way society lives, however, you would think that, like the Pharaohs of Egypt, we try to defy that statement. The Pharaohs were convinced that they would have their worldly treasures with them on the other side of the river of life, and so their burial chambers were built with space enough for their enormous wealth of possessions, to accompany them to "the other side".

Certainly, we are not quite so silly as to think that our wealth accumulation will accompany us, but our society often lives as if that were the only thing that mattered... and we do not easily challenge that assumption.

The other phrase, that “the love of money is the root of all evil”, is another one often trotted out, esp. if there has been a great crime with money as the chief motive.

“Love” is an inadequately translated word here. “Lust” (as some translations have it) is more accurate. The implication is a pursuit of it, as if it were the only important reality - the one god worshipped by all, whose voice is always listened to!

And how easily we let it take a grip on us. It has been said that with money there are only 2 measures: No money, and not enough money.

I am also sure that few of us would make blunt statements that money is what we lust after, or that it is our god, or that we have no balanced perspectives when it comes to money and lifestyle.

But it’s worth challenging ourselves, rethinking some of these issues:

To be sure exactly where our priorities lie.

To be sure we are not trying to prove Christ wrong -

by trying to serve 2 masters, and inevitably doing an injustice to the more important of them!

This will be neither the first nor the last sermon you hear on the subject, and as usual I make the disclaimer that one cannot cover all there is to say on it in one sermon. But a few important points should be emphasised:

Enjoyment of material things is NOT a problem in the Christian faith. Jesus did not ever seem to suggest that material things incl. money should be discarded or regarded as irrelevant. He was far too practical and realistic for that.

Christianity is material-friendly, in contrast to some religious philosophies, which suggest that only the spiritual counts, and that material things are to be discounted in their importance. Our faith tells us that all things created by God are good, and are to be enjoyed in their rightful place and with the right priorities, which means that they never become gods to us. As Timothy says, all things, given generously by God, are for our enjoyment!

But a point one learns in life is that we do the things that are most important to us. We focus time and energy on those things. Yes, there are exceptions – we have many demands and expectations made on us; we are sometimes obliged to do certain things; many of us struggle to get the balance right and to focus appropriately on all that we need to.

Yet there is a matter of choice; in other words, we often choose to put our best energies into those things which are most important to us, and leave other things for later – when there is no time or energy left.

We apply that to careers, where “getting ahead” may be at the expense of everything else; we apply it to sports or hobbies or leisure time or relationships. And we apply it to our relationship with God, positively or negatively.

We may even avoid what is uncomfortable, or that to which we are simply not committed. Sadly, God often fits into that “slot” / definition.

Jesus was deeply practical, and would never have suggested that people did not need to “earn a living”, or that there should be no enjoyment in life. He was even known to go to dinner parties – and even caused scandal by doing so when it was not with the most righteous people in town!

But he would have suggested a different set of priorities to that which our society seems to live by. He would have warned us not to get ensnared by the need to “get ahead”, or to confuse “making a living” with “making riches for their own sake”.

To give just one practical example, as it affects our faith, let’s look at what people often say when there is seemingly no time for prayer or for coming to church:

I’m too busy

I run my own business, so Sunday is too important a day for me

I work too hard in the week, and Sunday is my only day for...

(...relaxing with the family / seeing friends / gardening etc.)

It is too rainy / cold / hot

I’ve got people coming for lunch / dinner

Priests often hear people saying things like that ...

If we have no time for God, we need to tell God that, being honest enough that we can say to God: These are my priorities right now. Simply admit that other things are more important to us.

I also say that because many use the old line: “You don’t need to go to church to be with God”. To which I reply - absolutely correct. He’s everywhere that we are, and one needn’t be inside a building set aside for worship in order to meet with God.

But one also needs to ask, “When last did you spend time with God, in nature, on the golf course, in your garden... dedicated, quality time with God, as a measure of the importance you attach to the relationship?”

You may be wondering what all this has to do with “money”, and what we can take with us when we die. It is all about “lifestyle”, and the choices we make about how we live and where our priorities lie and what is most important to us.

Someone has said, “The rich are wounded by their riches as much as the poor are wounded by their poverty.” Think about that.

The way we live our lives, and the time we dedicate to developing our relationship with God, tells us something about the state of our spiritual health and maturity and honesty; it tells us whom or what we are really trying to serve; and whether we are striving for a balance that Jesus would commend us for, or an imbalance about which he would challenge us.

It also tells us whether we are living as “children of the light”, with dedication to the pursuit of godliness in our lives, holding on to the eternal life Jesus has given us, as Paul says in his letter to Timothy.

It would tell us whether we have removed the false partition between our faith and the rest of our lives, so as to take what we learn from time spent at church or in prayer or scripture reading, into the full breadth of our daily lives.

The priorities in our lives tell us whether we are building on those things we CAN take with us when we die, hence my earlier statement:

“Make sure you take it with you!”

What will YOU be taking with you into “the next life”?

To close, I will again read our passage from **1 Tim. 6** so that we may think about what we will take with us when we die – note especially the last part of that reading. (Read from “The Message” – Eugene Peterson’s contemporary-English-language paraphrase of the Bible.)