

IS IT ENOUGH?

Mark 10:17-31 and Malachi 3:6-12

September 28th 2015 (preached at 08:00 and 10:30 services)

For 8:00

Dear God,

I am so afraid to open my clenched fists! Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to? Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands? Please help me to gradually open my hands and to discover that I am not what I own, but what you want to give me. And what you want to give me is love, unconditional, everlasting love. Amen. – Henri Nouwen

For 10:30

Three boys are in a playground bragging about their dads.

'My dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a poem and they give him £20' says the first.

'That's nothing' the second chirps up, 'My dad scribbles some words on a piece of paper, calls it a song and he gets given £100.00 for it'

'Well,' murmurs the third, 'My dad scribbles a few words on a scrap of paper. Calls it a sermon, and it takes 5 people to collect all the money!'

There is a wealth of Jesus' teaching that looks at 'money', and we try to talk about it in all of our services at least once each year. If Jesus thought it was important enough to teach the disciples, we should surely do likewise!

We don't want to talk just about giving to the church – although that is an important part to belonging to the Church family – to pay the bills.

It is important that we learn that God wants us to be generous people. As a Church we want to model that and the PCC has at its last meeting agreed to commit to give 10% of the money we receive to other charities, so we can bless others as God has blessed us.

Today's readings help us to think about the issue of money and where we rank its importance in our lives.

Is it enough?

As you may well know Mark's gospel is the shortest of the 4, and has its own particular idiosyncrasies. Mark was keen to emphasise Jesus role as 'teacher' and he tends to distil Jesus' teachings down to the nitty-gritty – he cuts to the chase.

We find ourselves in the second half of his gospel and in the 2nd of 3 passages where Jesus is teaching on the theme of 'discipleship'. In Mark you will find recurring themes, recurring ideas, and recurring literary tools. Each of the 3 passages of teaching follow on from a prediction by Jesus of the passion – of the events that will unfold in Jerusalem leading to his death on the cross. Today's passage follows on from Mark 9:31 [He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."]

There is no doubt that some of the teaching was pretty tough stuff.

What did it REALLY mean to be a disciple?

What might the COST of following Jesus actually be? To me? To you?

Are we PREPARED to face that possible cost?

The people of the 1st century Jerusalem were in many ways no different from those of 21st century Torquay – mostly interested in a better life, whatever that might mean, and if there was the promise of a solution from the lottery, from winning a TV talent show, from signing up to a special business plan, then OK – where's the pen?

And there were those who thought following this Teacher – this Rabbi – this Messiah-figure was going to be an easy route to a better life.

But that is NOT what Jesus was teaching them – this discipleship was going to cost –

This is what he told them in Mark 8:34:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

So now we have a bit of background let's have a look at this story and see if there is anything in it for us today –

This man – who knows and adheres to the Mosaic Law – is asking Jesus 'Is it enough?'

Jesus quotes six of the laws in the Decalogue – those that deal with actions or attitudes towards others – and the young man says ‘I’m keeping them all - I have been doing all I have been taught to do since my Bar Mitzvah – Is that enough? Because somehow it doesn’t FEEL like it is enough.’

Do you feel any pity for this man? I do.

Jesus clearly did – look – ‘Jesus, looking at him, loved him’.

I think it is a fair bet that this man was desperate to do what was right – I think you can guarantee that he gave exactly 10% of all his money to the temple – his ‘tithe’ – because he knew the law and he kept the law – he would know the verses from Malachi that we heard this morning –

And yet Jesus could see right to his core – to his heart – and Jesus knew how close he was, and here he was, wanting to know the answer.

I don’t think that Jesus’ answer was meant in anyway to trip him up, to embarrass him, to be used as a teaching point for Apostle School. He genuinely wanted to show him the gate, the doorway to eternal life, and he could see that for this man the thing that was preventing him from fully honouring God – the problem for him was his money.

Jesus was not saying that the money in itself was the problem – it was the position that money and possessions had in his life that was the problem.

Like a doctor, Jesus was offering the man a tailored prescription – ‘this is what YOU need to do’.

For me, for you, for Peter and for Andrew – it would probably be a different prescription – but for this young ruler it was all about the money, and the initial response here is different from the response Jesus had from Zaccheus, the tax collector. It wasn’t so much that he had a hold of too much money, but that money had too much of a hold of him.

Is it enough?

No – it will never be enough until you have put God first in your life, over and above everything else. Look back at those verses from Mark Chapter 8 - [If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.](#)

For him the cross was to sell his goods and distribute them to the poor, and then he could follow Jesus.

CS Lewis is quoted as saying this:

*"I'm afraid that **biblical** charity is more than merely giving away that which we could afford to do without"*

Discipleship costs. Biblical charity costs.

We have this oft quoted proverb:

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

But he could just as easily have said:

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for an adulterer to enter the kingdom of God."

Or "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a backbiter to enter the kingdom of God."

Or "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who blasphemes to enter the kingdom of God."

Why?

Because none of us are worthy – none of us are able to stand in the presence of God on the basis of what we do – I come to Church, I give something to the collection, I smile at my neighbour - Is it enough?

No. Not in itself. We have to put Jesus first and then – only through the GRACE of God – only because of the SACRIFICE of Jesus on the cross – only then can we stand in the presence of God.

It might be harder than for a camel passing through the eye of a needle, but look at verse 27 – "Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

In verse 28 we see the disciples – still not really understanding it all – asking Jesus –

"but Boss – we gave everything away and followed you - is THAT enough?"

I think Jesus would have looked at Peter with the same love that he looked on the young man with – "Peter, oh Peter – I **know** what you have done; I **know** what you have sacrificed; it hasn't gone un-noticed. You will certainly get a fair return **BUT**

(did you notice the aside thrown in?)

You'll get your returns AND WITH THEM PERSECUTIONS

It isn't going to be easy – it isn't a free ride – discipleship costs.

Is it enough?

I don't know. What do YOU think? Do you think that if you rushed up to Jesus and knelt before him saying 'Lord, is it enough?' he would be reaching for the prescription pad? What might he write on it for you?

We have had some teaching on the GIFTS that God has given to us and on the FRUIT that he wants us to show.

Malachi speaks of bringing in the whole tithe to God's storehouse – I don't believe it is just about our money – I think Jesus is making a point to the disciples that it is MORE than about the money - God has blessed us all with gifts – maybe art, music, teaching. We might use them for our jobs to earn a living or for our recreation to satisfy us – but do we give back to God from the abundance that he has given to us?

Not just the money we receive. The skills and gifts – the financial acumen – the secretarial skills – the communication and loving – the teaching and music.

And do we give it with JOY as part of our WORSHIP to him?

Do we give out of what we would not miss? Does it cost us?

Is it enough?

At 10:30

Dear God,

I am so afraid to open my clenched fists! Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to? Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands? Please help me to gradually open my hands and to discover that I am not what I own, but what you want to give me. And what you want to give me is love, unconditional, everlasting love. Amen. – Henri Nouwen