

ST PETER

DE BEAUVOIR TOWN



Lent Talks - Materials

These take place in Church after the 10am service. They last about thirty minutes and include ten minutes of the method of prayer explored. All are welcome.

- **Sunday 6th March: Where your treasure is**

An introduction to the Lent At-Home Bible Study series: *Money Makes Change* from ECCR. The Bible studies are all available at: www.eccr.org.uk/money-makes-change-bible-study/

'Jesus spoke about money a lot! It's not a topic to shy away from. Do we see our money as ours, or God's? How does that shape what we do with the resources we have? What we do with money can make a world of difference to those around us - from choosing an ethical bank to investing in companies that are building a fairer society. Do we see our financial decisions as part of our discipleship? This Bible Study can be used on its own or alongside other Money Makes Change resources to explore issues of faith and finance. It links to the Where your Treasure Is Action Area in the Money Makes Change Pledge.'

Readings: Isaiah 55: 1 - 9

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

1 John 3: 16 - 24:

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in

word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Luke 12: 13 - 21

Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?”’ Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So it is with

those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

Reflection - Dr Margaret Scott

'The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann once said: "Economics, far from being a side issue, is a core preoccupation of the biblical tradition." Our three texts are excellent examples of that "core preoccupation" and the searching questions that it posed to God's people then and the biblical insights that challenge us now. At first sight, the passage from the prophet Isaiah would seem to be a consoling message to God's people pining away in exile in Babylon. "Hang in there! God has not forgotten you. Everything will be all right in the end". But if we dig deeper, we discover a challenge addressed to the elite Jews who had been deported to Babylon. They had become involved in the economy and trade of the Babylonian Empire and so, had compromised their identity as God's people. Now they are confronted with an urgent choice to stop collaborating with the Babylonian authorities and to resist participating in an economy based on greed, where you are caught up in a cycle of working to pay for things that do not satisfy. "What are you doing? Why do you labour for that which does not satisfy?" The prophet offers them an alternative: an invitation to return to the generous abundance of God who gives the gifts needed for life. The Gospel text introduces us to a "Rich Fool". One could argue that this rich man is not foolish at all but, rather, a wise and responsible businessman. His land has produced so abundantly that he does not have enough storage space in his barns. So,

he plans to build bigger ones to store all his grain and goods. Then he will have plenty set aside for the future and will enjoy his retirement. So why is the rich farmer called a fool in the Gospel? The problem is that he has his priorities all wrong. He lives in his own little world - an audience of one - with not a thought for others or for God, who is the Lord of all, of life and death. The writer of 1 John is concerned that the church members he leads are falling away from the basic truths of their faith: the Christian community should believe in Jesus Christ, God's own Son, and should love one another. The biblical message is clear. We should love one another, but really love one another. Not just in words. Words are cheap. What counts are our actions. "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help them?" These three texts are about the challenges that face us too: our acceptance or rejection of greed as normal, our selfishness or dependence on God, and how we respond to those in need.

Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What does 'abundant life' look like in the Isaiah reading? How might our society's view of 'abundant life' differ from this?
- ▶ A basic question that Scripture poses is "When is enough, enough?" How do we know when we're being greedy?
- ▶ Isaiah's listeners were challenged to make a choice. What are the choices and alternatives that we are faced with today?

- ▶ How do we view wealth and possessions? Are they mine, ours or God's?
- ▶ What should we prioritise? How can we 'invest' our lives and the gifts that God has given us for others?
- ▶ What would it mean for us - individually or as a church - to "walk the walk" rather than just "talk the talk" when we see our brothers and sisters in need?
- ▶ How can we live out our faith and love as Christians in the way we use our money and resources?

• **Sunday 13th March: What is prayer?**

Rowan Williams, Pause for Thought on the Terry Wogan Show (18 October 2005) BBC Radio 2:

Well, Terry, I don't know how well placed I am, but [what] I do know is that many people find difficulty with prayer. It's one thing to talk about it but quite another to do it; and one of the questions I've often been asked is 'Have you any tips on how to pray?' Let me put it this way: I'm not much of a one for sunbathing; too much lying around and I get fidgety and a bit guilty. But there's something about sunbathing that tells us more about what prayer is like than any amount of religious jargon. When you're lying on the beach or under the lamp, something is happening, something that has nothing to do with how you feel or how hard you're trying. You're not going to get a better tan by screwing up your eyes and concentrating. You give the time, and that's it. All you have to do is turn up. And then things change, at their own pace. You

simply have to be there where the light can get at you. People often have the impression that praying is anxiously putting on your best clothes, finding acceptable things to say in the right sort of language, generally getting your act together - oh! and concentrating, of course. But when in the Bible Jesus advises his friends about how to pray, he tells them not to worry about any of this. Say, 'Father', he tells them. Just be confident that you're welcome as you would be at home. All you need to do is to be where the light can get at you - in this case, the light of God's love. Give the time and let go of trying hard (actually this is the difficult bit). God is there always. You don't need to fight for his attention or make yourself acceptable. He's glad to see you. And he'll make a difference while you're not watching, just by radiating who and what he is in your direction. All he asks is that you stay there with him for a while, in the light. For the rest, you just trust him to get on with it.

• **Sunday 20th March: Daily Prayer**

Fr Simon Tugwell, *Prayer: Prayer in Practice*, 62 - 66

'Liturgy is essentially something given, and in this it expresses a fundamental feature of all prayer. Its sublime lack of concern for our personal moods is a forcible reminder that when we come to God, it is not to force our moods or our interests on to him, but to receive his interests and to let him, in a sense, share his moods with us. If our primary model of prayer is that we should be allowed to express ourselves to God,

then we shall probably remain terribly imprisoned within ourselves and our prayer will become hopelessly stuck at a very elementary stage.

It is far more central to prayer that we should let ourselves become involved in God, in his great enterprise of giving himself, and all the various interests and concerns that form part of this. It is therefore a positive advantage that the liturgy does not just reflect our own concerns and interests, but confronts us with definite moods of its own.

We may come along feeling right down in the dumps and the liturgy will present us with praising psalms and alleluias. Or we may be as high as kites only to find ourselves obliged to recite penitential psalms. The prayers will in all probability have no relevance to the particular issues weighing on our minds at the moment, and may expect us to intercede for matters that do not interest us in the slightest.

All this is a challenge to us to become free enough and generous enough to be able, for the moment, to leave behind our moods and whims and even our most pressing concerns, and to engage ourselves in other moods, other interests. As long as we approach it wondering what we are going to get out of it, we are likely to remain discontented and bored. The question is much rather how far we are free enough from ourselves and in ourselves to be able to give ourselves, to put something into it. Then we shall find that it is in giving that we receive...

... It is not the immediate feeling that is important; that may or may not come. What matters is that we should be, slowly and quietly, moulded by this rehearsal for and anticipation of heaven. It is a schooling for

paradise. It is rather a misconception therefore to think that we should be making something of the liturgy. The truth is rather that the liturgy should be making something of us. It is therefore quite inappropriate for the celebrant or choirmaster to work up the people to an emotional state. This is not because dispassionate liturgy is intrinsically better - liturgy may turn out to be highly emotional. But emotion or lack of it is not what liturgy is about.

In our earthly liturgy we are, in a way, only eavesdropping, listening in on the liturgy of the saints. It is with the whole company of heaven that we worship, and it is their perfect worship which sustains and enfolds our prayer. Our participation should, of course, be as full as it can be; but it is of the nature of the case that it will never be perfect. We are doing something that is beyond us. By doing it, we may hope to become more capable of it, more capable of entering into the reality of what we perform. But in this life we shall never get more than a glimpse through a chink in the roof.

• **Sunday 27th March: Silent Prayer**

Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence*, 335 - 338

Silence just happens if you do nothing; but you also can keep silence. Keeping silence, rather than simply being there when silence happens, is the conscious acceptance of, and the alignment of one's activity with, what was already there. Silence in worship is not in the

first instance produced by the assembled group. To start with, it just happens, without or even despite their intentions. It arises out of the background; in fact, what we hear as silence could (almost always) equally be heard as a collection of background noises. Silence starts by 'just happening', out there, beyond and without and despite the people gathered in worship; but it need not stay there. The worshipping group can participate in it, take it up and take it in. [p.335]

For another perspective on this shifting of power and action, think about the familiar line from the service book: 'Silence may be kept'. The verb is in the passive, so that it is not specified who keeps the silence. Silence makes particularly apparent the questioning of common categories of agency and passivity that is implicit in the whole idea of worship. Worship is divine and human action - neither at the expense of the other; and it is also, insofar as it is work, the work of the whole people of God. Keeping silence together destabilises assumptions about power and authority - whose silence is this? Who is responsible for keeping it? Can it be kept unless everyone present keeps it? [p. 336]

To speak of communal silence as something that attends to creaturely complexity and invites interruption is slightly counter-intuitive. Consider, for example, the well-known (and very ancient) hymn: 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence / and in fear and trembling stand; / ponder nothing earthly-minded, / for, with blessing in his hand, / Christ our God to earth descendeth / our full homage to demand'. At first reading, this sounds like an injunction to keep silence as a way of separating

oneself from 'the world', from whatever is fleshly and earthly and mortal - entering a different time and space. So, is silence in worship perhaps about 'putting cares aside', 'leaving behind' the everyday - and, negatively, about quietism, the neglect of ordinary or everyday or worldly concerns? I think this is only the case if we forget that the hymn is about incarnation. This is a celebration not of escaping the world but of finding God at the heart of the world - holding everything together, engendering new forms of connection. Silence with the incarnation at its centre is not unworldly; and giving 'full homage' to the incarnate one is not about forgetting everything that belongs to the world and to time, but rather finding a transformed relation to the world and to time. [p. 338]

• **Sunday 3rd April: The Jesus Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy On Us

Mother Thekla, *Eternity Now*:

'It is better to start with a very few repetitions and then, perhaps, the prayer will gradually take over and we shall repeat it more freely. It may even continue in our hearts, through the rhythm of the working day and through the night. I cannot over stress that the Jesus Prayer is not a means of leaving the world. It is rather a means, if it is a means, of uniting heaven and earth, of refusing to be absorbed in the world around and of consistently, whatever the circumstances, putting our

purest attention on what is beyond the world. The prayer, as all Orthodox religious practice, is entirely practical: 'I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringers forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.' But perhaps the greatest joy of the Jesus Prayer for each of us is that it is entirely secret. No one should or does know when we pray it, how we pray it, and (if such a term can be applied) with what success. The Jesus Prayer: the secret prayer of the heart, secret to humanity, open to God'

Archimandrite Sophrony, *On Prayer*, 142 - 143

'It is possible to establish a certain sequence in the development of this prayer. First, it is a verbal matter: we say the prayer with our lips while trying to concentrate our attention on the Name and the words. Next, we no longer move our lips but pronounce the Name of Jesus Christ, and what follows after, in our minds, mentally. In the third stage mind and heart combine to act together: the attention of the mind is centred in the heart and the prayer is said there. Fourthly, the prayer becomes self-propelling. This happens when the prayer is confirmed in the heart and, with no especial effort on our part, continues there, where the mind is concentrated. Finally, the prayer, so full of blessing, starts to act like a gentle flame within us, as inspiration from on High.'