

## Sermon for the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Trinity

Psalm 49: 5 - 12,

- 5 Why should I fear when evil days come,  
when wicked deceivers surround me—  
6 those who trust in their wealth  
and boast of their great riches?  
7 No one can redeem the life of another  
or give to God a ransom for them—  
8 the ransom for a life is costly,  
no payment is ever enough—  
9 so that they should live on forever  
and not see decay.  
10 For all can see that the wise die,  
that the foolish and the senseless also perish,  
leaving their wealth to others.  
11 Their tombs will remain their houses forever,  
their dwellings for endless generations,  
though they had named lands after themselves.  
12 People, despite their wealth, do not endure;  
they are like the beasts that perish.

Luke 14: 27 – 33

Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” 31 Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

What is a Christian? Definition....

Someone who is Baptised?

Someone who believes in the Creed?

Who attends Church?

Who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Saviour?  
Someone who does good?  
Perhaps a person born into Christian culture?

Here's a simple definition, a Christian is someone who follows the teachings of Christ – a does what it says on the tin definition – a Christian is someone who follows the teachings of Jesus.

So are you a Christian, do you follow the teachings of Jesus?

If so how are you doing with this one?

Jesus said, "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple", and "...none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

How's that going to go down in the modern world?

The briefest leaf through a popular glossy magazine will suffice to show that in this world, you are what you own, and that giving up all that you have for the sake of one individual, even if you suspect that individual is the Son of God, is just not going to happen.

To be honest, we are all rather attached to what we have, and wonder what Jesus would want with it anyway.

Yet I also suspect that most of us consider that materialism and greed may be corrupting our society.

I once spoke to a lady today who grew up in 1950s in West Lothian, she said it was a simple rural upbringing, without much money.

She said, "We didn't have much, but we had everything", then she added, "some people these days have everything, but don't have much".

Do you know what she means?

Poverty is terrible evil, she was not saying that poverty is good, the present Cost of Living Crises is going to mean many are tipped into poverty who would usually expect to get by, but in our society do we have an ever expanding definition of enough?

The more we get the more we want.

William Morris wrote,

'I have never been in any rich man's house which would not look the better for having a bonfire made outside of nine-tenths of all that it held.'

There is a gravity about possessions, the more we get of them the more we want, and the more we get of them the more they weigh us down.

Mizuta Masahide, a 17th century Japanese poet and samurai, wrote,

“My barn having burned down, I can now see the moon.”

Hard times focus our attention on what really matters, in the pandemic people seemed to rediscover the value of community and nature, we learn important lessons when hard pressed.

Our economy has become fuelled by cheap credit and mass consumption. The function of the citizen has become to acquire stuff, on the High Street I shop therefore I am. Land fill, storage cupboards, over-drafts, liposuction, produce mountains, gigabytes, greenhouse gases, downloads, super fast broadband, garages full of junk, gardens full of cars, fad diets, packed curriculums, performance targets, buy one get one free – perhaps we could better see the moon with a little less?

Not that humanity has learnt a new trick in the age of global capitalism, in his book, ‘On Walden Pond’, published 1854, Henry David Thoreau writes,

‘Not long since I was present at the auction of a deacon's effects, for his life had not been ineffectual. As usual, a great proportion was trumpery which had begun to accumulate in his father's day... And now, after lying half a century in his garret and other dust holes, these things were not burned; instead of a bonfire, or purifying destruction of them, there was an auction, or increasing of them. The neighbours eagerly collected to view them, bought them all, and carefully transported them to their garrets and dust holes, to lie there till their estates are settled, when they will start again.’

The desire to acquire is as old as humanity, the mistaken idea that security is to be found in material possessions rather than in spiritual devotion is ancient, it is just that we moderns have increased our means beyond the most extravagant dreams of the ancients.

In Psalm 49 we heard,

- 5 Why should I fear when evil days come,  
when wicked deceivers surround me—
- 6 those who trust in their wealth  
and boast of their great riches?
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or give to God a ransom for them—
- 8 the ransom for a life is costly,  
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- 9 so that they should live on forever  
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10 For all can see that the wise die,  
that the foolish and the senseless also perish,  
leaving their wealth to others...

12 People, despite their wealth, do not endure;  
they are like the beasts that perish.

The Psalmist is blunt, that which we own, be it possessions, status, career, ideology, even our dearest relations, all end in the grave. No one can pay the ransom for a life, the cost is too great, that is no one except Jesus, who gave his life as a ransom for us.

The people with the big memorials on these church walls are as dead as the people with little memorials, or none at all.

Jesus asks us to trade the mortal for the immortal, the perishable for the imperishable, to release our grip on false security before it slips inevitably through our fingers, and to instead take hold of the cross.

The advertisers try to persuade us to exchange our lives for stuff with the promise that the stuff we buy will make us happy. Jesus asks us to redeem our lives by giving up our stuff.

Jesus said, 'whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the good news will save it.'

In our gospel passage Jesus asks his disciples to give up everything, and to take up the cross. This means to offer to Jesus all that we are, not just to stream line our material possessions, or to send off a cheque to Charity, the call is uncompromising – everything.

That includes our fears as well as our hopes, our weaknesses as well as our strengths, our disabilities as well as our abilities, our self-doubt as well as our pride.

Jesus may well ask us to continue to carry the responsibility of all that we are in the service and love of others, but in his service the burden becomes light. Giving to Jesus all that you are enables a life giving reordering of your priorities. The cross is a gateway to a new and better life in this world and the next. It is not just our society that is over-laden, it is not just our neighbours, it is each one of us who need to turn to Jesus and receive his healing and forgiveness. To leave at the foot of the cross all that we possess, so that we may then perceive who we truly are.

Amen.

These prayers were used...

Grant us, O Lord, not to mind earthly things, but to love things heavenly, and while now we dwell among things that are passing away, to cleave to those that shall abide for ever; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God, Whose blessed Son, Jesus Christ, earned His bread at Nazareth by the labours of His hands, and taught us that our possessions are a trust from Thee: help us to be faithful stewards of what Thou givest; that in earning we may be just and honest, and in spending we may not only seek our own good, but Thy glory and the good of others; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ.