

Joel 2: 23-32

Psalm 65

2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18

Luke 18:15-30

*These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word*

It has been said that ‘actions speak louder than words’ and so for today’s sermon let’s see if we can enact our oneness with the Church....

We will do this as we share communion, a sacramental action in which, together with the Church universal, we enact a ritual in which we recognise ourselves as members of one body, the body of Christ.

Today we’ll seek to do the same with the gospel, the Word of God and the good news revealed in Christ.

Can we see ourselves as one with the whole Church as we hear and respond to the gospel?

I invite you all to take the sticky label that was handed out at the beginning of the service, then turn to page 8 of the service sheet, peel off the label and stick it over the words that are just about in the middle of the gospel reading.....

If we can cover up the words that Jesus speaks, the words that made the ‘certain ruler’ sad; then we too can be one with the Church in not seeing what is written there. We can ignore this text, which is central to today’s gospel and perhaps the whole teaching of Christ.

Having done that, and it is perhaps important to actually act this out, we might reflect on, and appreciate where we are as church in relation to the Gospel and to all that Christ has revealed.

I often wonder why those who proclaim a literal interpretation of the bible never seem to give voice, yet alone action, to this very clear text.

A 2011 Gallup survey reports, "Three in 10 Americans interpret the Bible literally, saying it is the actual word of God." [Jeffrey M. Jones – Gallup]

And again from Gallup; since 1982, between 40% and 50% of adults in the United States say they hold the creationist view that "God created humans in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years".

I guess these same ‘fundamentalists must have done what we’ve just done, and put a sticky label over that text that is central in today’s gospel.

Two instances this week have provided opportunity for some reflection in relation to the overall position of the Church (and so too our culture) when it comes to giving.

On Monday evening our Church Council met, and we had been given some homework from the previous month’s meeting. The task was seemingly simple, each member of council was asked to share their ‘position’ and their ‘understanding’ of “giving”.

We discovered on Monday just how difficult a task this was as less than half of us were able to complete the task.

Now that likely indicates a common pattern within the Church universal, it is a pattern that we have illuminated by making obvious that part of the gospel that we have not seen. The meeting continued to the treasurer's report where we were told that there was not enough money in our bank account to cover the direct debit payments that were due by the end of the week.

That was not the first time we had received that news from the treasurer, it had also happened only a month or two before.

The other instance was the report in all the media about Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst. It came under the news headline: "Pope banishes Germany's 'bling bishop' from diocese. The Vatican has suspended a scandal-tainted German Catholic cleric dubbed the "bling bishop" for his luxury lifestyle."

Like many we probably joined in passing swift judgement, but were we actually showing a relative (and so self-righteous) indignation?

Of course we do not spend 15,000 euros on a bathtub, and we do not see ourselves as 'bishops of bling' leading a luxury lifestyle.

But it sobering to appreciate that we in Australia are in the top 5% of wealthiest when measured in terms of GDP per capita;

Our 'per head wealth' is \$44,598, we rank 9<sup>th</sup> in the world, the Democratic Republic of Congo (ranking 180) has a 'per head wealth' of just \$422.

The 'bishop of bling' was accused of living a life of luxury, and so being in the top %5 on the planet, we might appreciate that most of the world would look at us in the same light.

So what if we peel back the sticker and really take a look at this difficult text.

The dialogue begins with a question in verse 18; "*A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*"

Surely, that is also our question! And we probably know that we've not yet fully found the answer.

Jesus first points to the commandments, which we all do know, and the 'ruler' affirms that he has "*kept all these since my youth.*" He is a good Anglican – maybe he is like us or like we see ourselves.

Then comes the bombshell; "*When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."*"

And here we get stuck, for how can this be?

Perhaps, what is being illuminated in this narrative is an orientation, a process rather than an event. For Christ makes manifest the activity of God; and the activity of God, the divine activity is one of 'giving'.

The story of creation is a story of Divine gift, and the Christmas nativity is a story of Divine giving; *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"*.

The Easter story brings together gift and giver, and a returning to Divine, it tells of the fullness of giving in the Gift of Christ, humanity giving fully into the oneness of God.

The orientation in today's gospel seeks to 'teach' the activity of Giving to one who is rich, one who holds on to his wealth. And in that light it is gospel for all of us who claim to be the richest 5% in the world.

Each of us asks the question: *"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

And the answer we receive is to open ourselves to a new orientation, a new way of life.

The prophet Joel in the first reading celebrates the abundance and the Divine presence that is a reality in the midst of all people, *"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh"*.

In verse 18 Joel speaks of insight, dreams and visions, in other words a seeing beyond the way we are, beyond a clutching onto life and seeking to take whatever we can in order to survive, and toward a divine vision of Life that is 'eternal'.

When we ask the question: *"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*; we learn from the second reading that it will require of us active participation, striving and effort; it will require us to fight the good fight and finish the race, it ask us to make real the blessing of our baptism.

So, we can stay as we are, the church, with a sticker pasted over the gospel, or we can have faith, and seek to give all that we have and all that we are into the creation of a new tomorrow.

*Peace be with You*

