

Sunday, October 10th. 2021. Trinity 19

Amos 5. 6-7. 10-15, Psalm 90. 13-17, Mark 10. 17-31

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In 1989, the churchwardens at Wingrave, Cublington and Aston Abbots invited my mum and me to a meal to thank me for helping them during an interregnum. When we got to the coffee, my mum said, "We should have brought the camera and taken a photo." As it was only 8 minutes from home, I went back home to get it, and, on going upstairs, I realised that we had been burgled. When I got back, my mum didn't react and said afterwards, "It's only possessions." I was a bit shocked at hearing that. I think that she was relieved that they hadn't caused damage in the house.

In today's Gospel, a man asks Jesus what he should do to gain eternal life. He is somewhat shocked and disappointed when Jesus tells him that he needs to go beyond the commandments, which he says that he has kept, sell his possessions, give to the poor and follow him. For Mark, the answer does not lie in obedience and just keeping commandments. Jesus is portrayed as saying that the man's wealth is preventing him from living in a way, which leads to eternal life. He then teaches his disciples how hard it is to let go of things, which prevent our participation in the kingdom.

The kingdom of God, then, involves a complete change in attitudes and direction. It wasn't that wealth was preventing the man in the story from finding the kingdom of God, but it was preventing him from putting the kingdom of God first in importance in his life. In school, some pupils find it extraordinary difficult to put their studies first and give up some other activities for a while when they have important exams to concentrate on. In our jobs, we can sometimes find it difficult to prioritise and concentrate on what is really important. It seems easier to stick to the things, with which we are familiar, rather than step out into the unknown.

In the first reading, Amos shows that justice and righteousness are based on the covenant relationship between God and his people. But they are failing to follow these ways. Those, who exploit other people despise those, who protest against their injustices in the gate, the place where court was held, even though they know that those, who defend the exploited, speak the truth. Their main concern, should be to seek good and deal fairly in the law courts. However, it must go deeper; the people must not simply do good acts and refrain from evil ones. They must hate evil and love good.

The house of Joseph is the Northern Kingdom because of the tribal territory of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. So, as in the Gospel, the people have to put God's way at the centre.

Psalm 90 proclaims that our deepest need is for God's presence and his saving love: 'Show your servants your works, and let your glory be over their children.' It won't bring escape from death, but it makes possible the joyful acceptance of the limitations of life: 'Satisfy us with your loving-kindness in the morning, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.'

Most of us would not class ourselves as rich, although, compared to people in poorer countries, we are. But we do have things, which we cling to, and letting go shocks us. So, what is our identity? Who are we? What do we want out of life? Are we in any way able to find our priorities? Is being part of God's kingdom our main identity, or does it come second or lower down the scale to what we think are more important things? Or do we know deep down that there is a better way, but we can't do it? Jesus seems to suggest that we can't always do it: 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God.'

The last sentence, 'But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first' says that our values are not necessarily those of God and that the twelve may not be entitled to any special priority finally.

Can we try to put God at the centre and allow him to change us, so that we can seek what is really important and find the true meaning of life?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.