

*Christ Church New
Southgate & Friern Barnet*

18 September 2022

Welcome

Reading: Psalm 113

Praise the Lord!

**Praise the Lord, you his servants;
praise the name of the Lord.**

²Let the name of the Lord be praised,
both now and forevermore.

³From the rising of the sun to the place
where it sets,

the name of the Lord is to be praised.

⁴The Lord is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.

Song: All creatures of our God and King

Lift up your voices and with us sing

Alleluia, alleluia

Thou burning with golden beam

Thou silver moon with softer gleam

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,

Thou rushing wind that art so strong

Ye clouds that sail in heavâ??n a long

Alleluia, alleluia

Thou rising morn in praise rejoice

Ye light of evening find a voice

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,

Thou flowing water pure and clear

Make music for thy Lord to hear

Alleluia, alleluia

Thou fire so masterful and bright

That gives to man both warmth and light

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,

Reading: Luke 16.1-13

Jesus said to his disciples, "There was once a rich man who had a servant who managed his property. The rich man was told that the manager was wasting his master's money, ²so he called him in and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Turn in a complete account of your handling of my property, because you cannot be my manager any longer.'³ The servant said to himself, 'My master is going to dismiss me from my job. What shall I do? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg.'⁴ Now I know what I will do! Then when my job is gone, I shall have friends who will welcome me in their homes.'⁵ So he called in all the people who were in debt to his master. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe my master?'⁶ 'One hundred barrels of olive oil,' he answered. 'Here is your account,' the manager told him; 'sit down and write fifty.'⁷ Then he asked another one, 'And you—how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he answered. 'Here is your account,' the manager told him; 'write eight hundred.'⁸ As a result the master of this dishonest manager praised him for doing such a shrewd thing; because the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light."

⁹ And Jesus went on to say, "And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. ¹⁰ Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones. ¹¹ If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?"

¹³ "No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a slave will hate one and love the other or will be loyal to one and despise

the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Song: I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God He calls me friend
Who am I that You are mindful of me
That You hear me when I call
Is it true that You are thinking of me
How You love me it's amazing

I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God

He calls me friend

Prayers for the world

Lord's Prayer

Song: God, the maker of the heavens

And the planet that we share
Show us how to live, like Jesus
Lives of gratitude and care
Make us mindful of the footprints
From the lives that we pursue
Make us partners in your mission
You are making all things new

God, the gardener of Eden
Teach us how to tend this earth
Learning from the changing seasons
Times of fallow and new birth
Lord have mercy when we're careless
Rich resources we misuse
Use our hands to heal creation
You are making all things new

God of labour and vocation
Lord of science, trade and art
Take our efforts and our passions
Make them mirrors of your heart
Every habitat and creature
Loved and valued, God, by you
May our lives reveal your Kingdom
You are making all things new

Sermon: Creativity and Christ

This is an odd parable. It is strange because it appears that Jesus is recommending dishonesty. On the one hand we know the Lord is one who upholds truth and faithfulness and calls Christians to follow Christ, on the other hand this parable is told by Jesus to his disciples and the pharisees listening nearby just after the prodigal son parable, so we must explore it some more. We must be open to the Spirit to speak to us through all scripture and allow God to show his light into our reading of scripture and so into our lives.

Chapter 16 of Luke's gospel was written decades after Jesus died and rose again. It begins with a very short introduction – Jesus said to his disciples, but we also know that chapter 15 was to the pharisees, as there is no change of location, we assume this parable is for all to hear but especially the disciples. In v9 the story changes tone. Take a look, and Jesus went on to say ... and then we hear some sayings of Jesus about money. The suggestion of biblical commentators is that Luke puts the parable and the sayings together for his readers the early church. The gospel of Luke is not a minute-by-minute description of what Jesus did next, it is a collection of the stories and sayings and actions of Jesus according to Luke. From this outstanding work, we meet Christ, we hear him speaking like no other text 1000s of years old.

The parable seemed very odd to me, until I learnt about the financial world of the biblical era. Exodus 22.25 says that no interest can be charged on loans in Jewish law. But here we have a parable where a rich man has two debtors with big debts. The manager is to be sacked. The rich man tells his manager to prepare his accounts and leave. So, the manager asks each debtor to change their bill. Why does he do this?

I once got a taxi from a train station to a conference centre. When I arrived, I asked for a receipt. The taxi driver smiled and said, 'here you go love' and handed me several small receipt cards signed by himself, he said 'you can fill in the amount'. Was he being lazy? Was he being kind? Was he expecting me to put in the £10 fare and tip, or to round it up to £20, claim it on expenses and keep some for myself? Why is the manager asking the debtors to change the bill? In their favour? He is able to do this because the rich man is doing something a bit dodgy.

All of us know that credit cards are bad news when you don't pay it off straight away, for interest added to interest just grows and grows. If a car cost £500 on credit, you can end up paying £1000 if you pay it off bit by bit with interest. All of us know this is bad news, and we know it's really bad news for those who have no choice because they don't have £500 to start with but really need a car. No interest was allowed to be collected on loans to protect the poor. This is a good law for the poor from Exodus 22, but not so good if you want to be in business and make money. So many rich men had found a way round this problem. If you allowed a debt of oil or wheat, it was not a loan because everyone had a small amount of oil or wheat at home. Therefore, interest could be charged. Instead of trading in money, goods were used instead.

If you've ever seen 'The Pursuit of happiness' with Will Smith as the lead playing Chris Gardner an investment bank intern looking for a break. Gardner was an unpaid intern desperately trying to land a real job with real freedom to get out of a terrible cycle of poverty and low paid work.

The manager in the parable would normally have been a slave or a freedman. A person who had just been made free or was working at freedom and had a good life in sight but just out of reach. Being the manager of a rich

man's estate was a way out of poverty for the lowest in society. The manager in our parable is grasping at a new life, one with security, status and honour. With his job taken away, he is forced to think creatively about his future.

I went to a restaurant for a meal with my brother. We noticed that there was a 20% discount for cash payments. My brother said: that's funny, VAT is 20%. What does this discount do? A reduced price for the customer, cash for the owner and less money to report to the tax man. You might say a win-win. But a very grey area?! The manager, asks each debtor to rewrite the bill removing the 'interest' on the loan that is definitely not a loan, reducing the bill for the individual and making the rich man look pious and good, and giving the steward friends in his crisis. This is the only real way the rich man can praise his manager, he is saying – fair play, touché, 'I see what you've done and I respect your savvy nature'.

What then can Jesus recommend from telling this parable? How can Jesus say "And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. Jesus then says you cannot serve both God and money. So what does this mean?

By telling this parable, Jesus shows that he knows that the world is unfair. He knows that we can all end up in situations at work that are not right, unfair and unjust. All of us can find ourselves in grey areas. What number should I have put on my taxi receipt? Should we pay cash in shops that give a discount for cash? Should we bend the rules of where we work to help those in need? Is there a situation have you been in -or are in right now - where you are unsure how to be children of light in this world?

Jesus is encouraging us to be creative. Jesus is suggesting that we spot the opportunities

to thrive for us and for others and to use them for the Kingdom of God.

In the pandemic, churches had a variety of responses to the challenge of lockdown. One church I heard, put a box of prayers printed on a sheet in the porch of the church and told the congregation to come and get them if they wanted them. Meanwhile, some churches ran prescription services and food supplies for the elderly in rural areas. Some churches entered the new world of digital church and have not gone back. At the time, no-one knew what to do, no-one knew quite what was right.

But there was a curious comparison to small businesses on the High Street. Mary Portas, a business guru said that the crisis forced businesses to rethink and be creative:

“Many of shops have woken up to: ‘Actually I can do deliveries. I can get a digital presence,’” she says. “I was talking to [a bookshop owner] the other day, and they said: ‘I’d never had a website before and I’ve set it up, and I’ve already taken 25% of what I took last year. And I’m able to deliver the next day in the way that Amazon can.’”

She sees these shops as key to innovation on the high street. “I’m calling them the local disruptors,” she says. “They are the ones who have learned from this, and they won’t go back.”

Some churches found the pandemic paralysing. Others realised the opportunity to be had in a crisis. None of us know when a crisis may come, but let us be creative when it does. How can we be a local disruptor for the kingdom of God? Let us not just accept the injustice of the world and think that God wants us to accept it. Jesus is encouraging us to be savvy, creative, think outside the box.

God creator of the heavens, maker of the universe is making all things new. Our world is always evolving, and our call as disciples of Christ is to be in this world, to make friends

in this world and to use everything at our disposal to bring God’s light into this world. Jesus teaches us many wonderful ways to follow him, in obedience, in self-sacrifice, in serving others. Jesus also calls us to be creative. To look at this world and ask the Lord, how can I work in this situation for God’s glory? How can I be light in this world of darkness? For the God who created flowers that grow in tiny cracks in walls, grants us the same gift of creativity and calls us to use it.

Prayer

Song: There’s a love that seeks us,
love that will not leave us,
knows our deepest longing,
drives away our fear.
There’s a God who holds us,
lovingly enfolds us;
we will lack for nothing,
trusting he is near.

*Our God, you’re wonderful,
your love will never fail,
your goodness follows us through all our days.
Our God, you’re wonderful
your love forever will be with us.*

There’s a love that guides us,
walks the road beside us,
comforting, providing,
showing us the way.
Love will light the darkness,
where the valley’s deepest,
lead us through the shadows
to a resting place.

Communion

Song: We seek Your Kingdom throughout
every sphere
We long for Heaven’s demonstration here
Jesus, Your light shine bright for all to see
Transform, revive, and heal society

Before all things, in Him all things were

made

Inspiring culture, media, and trade
May all our work serve Your economy
Transform, revive, and heal society

Peace, truth, and justice reigning everywhere
With us be present in our public square
Fill all who lead with Your integrity
Transform, revive, and heal society

Forgive us, Lord, when we have not engaged
Failing to scribe Your heart on history's page
Make us again what we were made to be
Transform, revive, and heal society

Faithful to govern ever may we be
Selfless in service, loving constantly
In everything may Your authority
Transform, revive, and heal society
Transform, revive, and heal society

Blessing