

Trinity 10 'Mind sets' (Colossians 3 v2-4)

May I begin by thanking you for your good wishes and prayers during my recent illness. I'm more or less back to normal now; except for the beard, which may prove to be an enduring side-effect.

It was Elisabeth Perry who said to me of my illness, that "one minute you can be fit and well, and the next flat on your back: life's like that". That wise comment has a strong parallel in today's Gospel: *'I will say to my soul: Soul you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink and be merry. But God said... You fool this very night your life is being demanded of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'* (Luke 12v 19-20).

It is true that illness or death can sneak up on any of us at any time and catch us unprepared; then our plans and our comfortable living in a flash are worthless. That's why Jesus commends us all not to *'store up treasures for ourselves, but [to be] rich towards God'* (Luke 12v21). Or as Matthew's Gospel puts it: *'Store up treasure in heaven where moths and vermin cannot destroy'* (Matt 6v20).

As I said a few weeks ago: it is the spiritual treasure with which we fill our lives that endures; the cardboard box of our lives, in which we keep these treasures, is mortal, temporary and unreliable by comparison. [See SPH website, sermon 23 June 13].

Today, I want to concentrate on the positive aspects of becoming rich towards God, storing up treasure in heaven, concentrating on, words from today's reading from the Epistle to the Colossians (3v2-4)

'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory'

One of the things that amazed and entertained me about Michael Baughen (the former Bishop of Chester and Rector of that cathedral of Evangelicalism, All Souls Langham Place) was that he would preach on a text by deriving from the text a number of words beginning with the same letter; so you might get a text expounded using six words beginning with C, or 22 words beginning with Q (he often preached long sermons).

Today, I have for you 4 Ps from this text: **priorities, practicalities, perspective** and **perseverance**... but you will be relieved to know that my sermon is my usual length.

'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory'

Firstly, this text is about **priorities**.

The priority here is given to spending time thinking about the spiritual rather than the earth-bound. It is the same priority which the rich man in our Gospel parable is to have; the priority is treasure in heaven, not riches on earth. There is a time to develop riches on earth, career, family, position in the community, but at some point in our lives we must get beyond all that to being rich towards God not just rich towards ourselves.

It is that richness towards God that endures. It is that richness towards God which is our life with Christ, kept hidden with him until he is revealed again in the consummation of all things, in the revealing of the new heaven and new earth (described in Revelation 21). It is the richness of our life with Christ which forms our future in eternity.

SO our priority must be to ***'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth'***.

Secondly, this text is about **practicalities**.

We are **not** talking about withdrawing from the world, or becoming so heavenly minded that you are no earthly use. The context of this passage concerns the Cosmic Christ. Paul asserts that in Christ all the fullness of God dwelt **bodily**

(Col. 2v9). His assertion is that Jesus, the Christ, is completely divine but that divinity was embodied in the same way that you and I have a body. Paul is saying ***that in Jesus, God could be found in day to day physical action on earth.***

God can **still** be found in day to day physical action on earth, notably through the work of the Holy Spirit in believers, but you have to look a bit more closely to discern God's action in the world day by day. And if you don't bother to look, you won't ever see!

If you don't bother to look, you are unlikely to see how God has been active in your own life day by day. You have to look beyond the things of the earth to see the action of God, who is both **in** and **beyond** the earthly.

The practice of looking back over the events and emotions of your day at some point in the evening is an excellent way to train yourself to see God's activity in your daily life. Take 10 or 15 min to think about the main events of your day; and ask yourself the question **'Where is God in this?'** Think about your main emotions of the day and ask yourself **'What was God trying to point out through that?'**

Gradually you will learn to discern the things of heaven in and through the things of earth. And, gradually, you will find that you come to **'Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth'.**

This technique of looking at the events and emotions of your day and asking **'Where is God in this?'** is called THE EXAMEN and it forms a key part of the spiritual approach founded by St Ignatius (founder of the Jesuits). Ignatian spirituality, so called, is a very popular and effective guide to spiritual development today. Encouragingly, it is being re-discovered particularly in Protestant denominations, traditionally suspicious of more catholic spirituality.

SO, Why don't you try to use the Ignatian Examen to help to **'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth?'**

Thirdly, the text is about **perspective**.

The context in which we are to live our daily life is that **'we have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory'.**

We live **'in Christ'** and Christ lives **'in us'** (John 14v20 and 20 other NT texts). To block off the Christ-dimension of our living by concentrating only on the things of earth, is to deny part of who we really are. We need to set our minds on things that are above in order to be **authentically** the people we really are; people who live in Christ; people who take that heavenly dimension to human life with us wherever we go.

In another of his letters (to the Philippians) Paul expresses the same sentiment as **'We are free citizens of heaven'** (Phil 3v20); each of us must learn to put that perspective of heavenly citizenship onto our daily living here on earth. **'Where is God in this event/circumstance/emotion?'** is again a great place to start to recognise the actions and personality of the God who is with us every moment of our day; the Christ **in** us. **'What would God have me do?'** is another great question to ask before acting, so that you can fully express your citizenship of heaven in your daily life. Again, the Ignatian Examen is a useful technique to help us day by day to reinforce that essential perspective on our living; that our lives are lived **with Christ in God**; that we are free citizens of heaven NOW.

Finally, the text is about **perseverance**

You can't learn to live out the text in a day or a week. You might do it by persevering for a month or two. Becoming heavenly minded in daily life takes *daily* practice; we must persevere until it becomes a habit.

God is a God of revelation. God is surprisingly easy to find. We don't have to go on great expeditions, Christian house parties or pilgrimages; God is already there in our day to day lives – with us wherever we go – but we fail to recognise him. We **all have to learn to recognise** God in our daily lives; it is that **recognition** that takes time and effort. We must **learn to discern** what is God's activity in our daily lives and what is simply our own. Habit-forming,

daily reflection on the events and emotions of our day, asking ourselves 'Where is God in this?', is the best way to learn to recognise the God **in** whom we live and move and have our being.

Applied as a **priority**, with **practicality**, **perspective** and **perseverance**; Applied through the reflective technique of the Ignatian Examen; this text can change your appreciation of God in daily Christian living really quite radically:

'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory'

Amen.