

All-age story : Zacchaeus *Luke 19 : 1-10*

Psalm 136 : 1-9

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures forever.

⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens,

His love endures forever.

⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters,

His love endures forever.

⁷ who made the great lights—

His love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to govern the day,

His love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night;

His love endures forever.

1 Timothy 6 : 17-19

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Two weeks ago, we read together one of those really famous bible sentences. In fact, I think Christine quoted it again last week : one of those quotes that people have often heard even if they don't know the bible at all – you know the one? : “*You cannot serve both God and Money*”.

A saying like that seems to separate God and Money – put them as far apart as possible – either we're concerned with God or we're concerned with Money – either /or..... So perhaps it's not that surprising that for many people, talking about God and money in the same sentence seems all wrong! If we're serving God surely, ideally, we shouldn't have anything to do with Money.....

Of course, when we put it like *that*, it sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

How could any of us avoid money altogether?! Nuns and monks try to do

without money : but actually they're still involved : if they're not handling it themselves, other people are doing it for them....
It's just not practical to say God's people should have nothing to do with Money. Anyway, Jesus certainly didn't say that. We read specifically about him handling coins; we assume he earned his own living until he was thirty; we know he accepted financial help from supporters....
Jesus lived in a world of buying and selling and paying for things just as much as we do. And he's the one putting God and Money in the same sentence!

When Jesus told us we can't serve God and Money, he meant exactly that – we can't serve God if we're *servicing* Money – if Money is our driving force; if Money is number one in our lives. In other words, we can't *worship* both God and Money.

But serving God doesn't take us away from the everyday world. We all use money; we earn it or we're given it. We make choices about it.

We may spend money for other people as well as ourselves.

We may handle our own money, and/or family money, and/or money that belongs to the people we work for... As Christians, Money can never be our number 1, but money is part of our lives – a significant part. And money is part of the life of every church – a significant part.

If we stopped people in the street and asked them what the bible says about money, we might well get a different quote from the one we've already talked about. And I dare say that at least someone would say:

"Oh yes, doesn't the Bible say, 'Money is the root of all evil?'"

There's a song too, isn't there?"

There *is* a song – but the Bible does not say that. What the Bible says is :
"The LOVE of money is a root of all kinds of evil".

We're getting a clearer picture now, aren't we? Money is part of life – Jesus used it; we use it; our church uses it. And the Bible tells us : we mustn't SERVE money - because it would stop us serving God properly; we mustn't LOVE money - because it gets in the way of our loving God, loving family and friends; loving our neighbour..

These rules are absolutely sensible and wise. But they have sometimes made Christians feel they should keep their faith in God and their money separate! And that can make Christians reluctant to think about money in relation to God and church and their Christian faith.

I think every church tends to think that handling the money is somehow less of a Christian service than playing the hymns or reading from the bible and I think it all goes back to this misunderstanding over what the bible is telling us.

Whether we think of our own money – or whether we think of the church’s money – we need to see money as something that is just as relevant to our faith as our praying or anything else..

So : what do our bible readings today teach us about money?

First of all : everything we have comes from God! In Timothy it says : “*God .. richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*”. Isn’t that fantastic? God made a beautiful physical world with lots of ‘things’ in it. He gave us a sense of what is lovely; a sense of what is cleverly designed. God is happy for us to take pleasure in the things we own. He wants us to enjoy things and be thankful for them.

But many people – especially rich ones – don’t feel thankful at all. (As ‘Timothy’ points out, they may well be arrogant.) Many people just congratulate themselves on what they’ve got!

The world is no help, of course. The world makes much of money and of the sort of power and status that money often brings.....

God takes a totally different view. Look at Zacchaeus !

He’d got everything! He was CHIEF tax collector. He was WEALTHY.

He had no material worries. In the world’s eyes – he’s arrived!

But Jesus describes Zacchaeus as someone who is *LOST!* He’s lost because he’s put his hope and faith in something that can’t satisfy....

The Bible says : *don’t put your hope in money - put your hope in GOD !*

And that’s just what Zacchaeus decides to do. He meets Jesus and chooses to put his hope in God. And the immediate result is : he feels totally different about his money. He’s going to give away half his wealth. He’s going to give back the money he’s cheated people out of four times over!

He’s stopped serving Money – he’s started serving God. He’s stopped loving Money - he’s loving God – and his neighbour. His hope no longer lies in wealth : his hope is in Jesus.

So Zacchaeus becomes less rich in the eyes of the world – but much richer in his own eyes – and in God’s. In fact, he does all the things we’re urged to do in Timothy : he does good; he becomes rich in good deeds; he’s generous and he’s more than willing to share!

This self-made man becomes a Jesus-made man.

When we read about Zacchaeus, it’s so obvious that he gave that money away with a great big smile on his face.... That’s what Christian giving and sharing *should* be like. There’s no place for a miserable reluctance to enjoy things. There’s no place for miserable giving.

So – there’s a lot in these bible readings to help us have a general understanding about money: but we now have to think and pray about our *own* money.

If we have very little, we perhaps don’t identify with Zacchaeus at all – and doesn’t that letter to Timothy talk about the rich? – that’s not us either! We’re just the ones with the money problems! What does the bible say to us?

Well, there are two things here. First of all, having lots of money causes problems, just as surely as not having enough!

Second – and most important - however much or however little money we have: the same rules apply. God wants the same attitude from everyone. He wants *generous giving* and *willing sharing* from all of us. The differences will come in how much we give. Generous giving from one person may be 20 cents. Generous giving from another person might be 1,000 euro.

What’s more, God will draw us to different needs. One person may give *so much* to a charity in their home country; *so much* to their church; *so much* to a local cause.. Another person will give to quite different groups.

We all have a responsibility to pray through these issues for ourselves. And if we are regulars here at Peace Church – even more if we are members and have promised to give – we need to think carefully about what we give to this church.

As a church, we pay money to Friedenskirche every month for our share of this wonderful building, with this worship area, this lovely new furniture, the organ, the piano, the crèche, the kitchen, the Sunday School rooms and all the rest... We pay for the paper and ink for our service bulletins. We pay for *Peace Church News*. We buy bibles and bible notes and children’s materials to help us all learn more of God. We buy coffee and biscuits for after worship. We give basic help to people in real need. We send money to Christians in other countries who have so much less than the poorest of any of us.....And we thankfully receive from richer churches the money that covers the salary of our full-time pastor.

Peace Church costs money to run. If we are members or regulars, don’t we have a clear responsibility to help pay the bills?

This is no less a part of our *Christian* service than welcoming newcomers, praying for one another or taking communion : - we are allowed to mention God and money in the same sentence!

And when we listen to today's bible readings, don't we have to agree ? - :
God wants us to be thankful for the money we have. God wants us to
enjoy 'things'. *BUT*: God wants us never to rely on money –rather than
on him; God wants us to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and
willing to share.

We all have homework today! We all need to go home and work out what
we should be giving and to what causes.
May God guide us all. Amen.

Let us pray

Generous and loving God, thank-you for all we have to enjoy.
If we have more money than we need, keep us always thankful.
If we have very little money, keep us calm and give us wisdom.
May we always use money responsibly, as stewards of what you have
provided. Help us to be generous and willing to share – and help us to
enjoy giving. Show us what we should give to this church and to the
other causes you have laid on our hearts. May we all feel rich in the
knowledge of your love and care. In Jesus' Name, Amen.
