

The third Sunday in Lent 2022

Isaiah 55:1-9, Psalm 63:1-9, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Luke 13:1-9.

What is the most valuable thing you have? Your health, your faith, your family? What about time? Is that the most valuable thing we have? Why do bad things happen? Why war, terrorism and violence? Questions that find their way onto our lips into our hearts minds and prayers, perhaps even more so with current events in our world. It is a constant in our lives and always has been. Despite the religious instinct that seems to want a solution, and unfortunately often finds one in the realm of sin and punishment, Jesus offers no such answer to this question.

Indeed Jesus suggests that we *must not* link God with the brutality and violence that mar our world. By doing so we are potentially part of the problem! And to push home his argument, he chooses an example where there was no wicked Pilate, no war or brutality but an accident: the collapse of a tower – many things may have caused this to happen, who knows. Once again, Jesus completely de-sacralizes the incident. It has nothing to do with God, and he says simply, use the time that has been granted to you to bear fruit and he tells his listeners the story of the Fig tree. Thinking him to be the gardener, I believe Jesus is asking us to consider that time is gifted to us, 'let's give you another year to see how you might use it?'

Both Isaiah and Paul writing some 500 years apart seem to be of the same mind. They both ask, are your strivings a waste of the time given to you? Paul on his reflection on the events on the Exodus writes: Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.' Whilst Moses has ascended to the mountain Aaron has encouraged the people to make themselves a Golden calf and to have a great festival. 'Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?' Says Isaiah in the same vein. Why are you wasting your time and your energy? This is the question of Lent and of the Christian life, and the answer? Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.

One thing we cannot escape is the passing of time. One of my descendants Thomas Johnson bought a Grandfather clock in the 1850s from Greenwood a clock maker in Canterbury, it was passed from him to his son George and to his son Albert and his son, Arthur and in turn to his son, my father, Barry. It is my turn to claim that clock a sign of the passing years and in turn it will pass to another Thomas, my son. The modern idea of time as something to be measured finds its beginnings strangely enough in the monasteries and the need to mark the time of hours, particularly at night when monastics would rise to offer prayer before the sun could be traced across the sky. Following the Psalms to

pray seven times a day and to meditate upon God in watches of the night. But God's gift of time once it could be measured accurately, like anything else, became a commodity to be bought and sold, lost and wasted, but never purely enjoyed.

Jesus knew nothing of Einstein's theories of relativity, or Coordinated Universal Time; time for him was measured by the rising of the sun in the morning its passage across the sky and eventual setting. The Jewish Sabbath begins today, as it did then, at the setting of the sun on Friday evening. For us the vigil of the Sabbath begins as the sun sets on Saturday evening and we await the dawn. Church buildings were always oriented to the east to enable the worshippers to stand and greet the new day, a symbol of the resurrection.

I doubt that is possible for us to conceive of timelessness, let alone eternity. Augustine reminds us. *'Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.'*

This is what the Eucharist is all about this coexistence of past, present and future. The Eucharist remains the contrary of modern time. This is the place where time continues to arrive from eternity. Christ is present to us from the past *and* the future; what we are doing in the present is both memory and expectation, it is a moment of eternity. 'Time is money' wrote Benjamin Franklin in *'Advice to a Young Tradesman.'* Isaiah however offers a different vision, one which preempts the Eucharistic banquet:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
    come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
    come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without price.

Whether it is bread and wine or manure. The invitation is the same the result is the same, we are given time that we might be able to grow and bear fruit. And we do so in time, in the Christ who comes to us from beyond time, from beyond the war and the disasters, the personal disappointments and griefs. To ask 'where is God' as we travel in Lent on the Way of the Cross fails to take into account that God hangs upon that cross, that cross, through which every act of violence, every disaster, every grief has been redeemed. Any other thinking is simply a waste of God's gift of time. Amen.