

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.
20 October 2019
XVIII Trinity Proper 24
Jeremiah 31: 27-34
Psalm 119: 97-104
2 Timothy 3: 4-4: 5
Luke 18: 1-8**

And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

There are several lessons in this gospel reading — faithfulness, persistence, constant prayer, mercy. Overall, this reading is probably about prayer, constant prayer. But I think it is also deeper than that. I think it is about lives of faith. For it ends, ‘...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’ That phrase should perhaps give us pause, ‘...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’

What do lives of faith look like? What does God call us into? And what does Jesus model for us? If you really take a broad look at the themes, the messages, the teachings in the gospels, in the entire Bible actually, it seems that there are two broad themes — lives of prayer, and lives of mercy with compassion and works of justice. Those are the two things Jesus did over and over: prayed intensely and regularly, and was good to God’s people, loving, caring, inviting, and healing them. Far too often, religion, religious leaders, the Church, have obfuscated what it means to be faithful with details, and lists of do’s and don’ts. Don’t smoke, don’t drink, don’t gamble, don’t dance, don’t divorce. Do attend Mass every week, do make your confession before taking communion, do wear a head covering and appropriate attire when going into church, do fast... No wonder people are falling away from the church, no wonder attendance is down and churches are closing, no wonder young people aren’t attracted. We haven’t done a very good job of making ourselves attractive to the world. But God is attractive to the world. And touches our lives in a very real way, if we will let Him.

There is a great Old Testament passage from the sixth chapter of the book of Micah. “...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Jesus did justice, loved kindness, and walked humbly with his God. So what does that look like for us? And what do lives of faith look like?

Well first, I think it is about prayer. Frequent, regular, committed time apart with God. Not just a quick petition to get me out of this mess, to win this game or get this job, or take this illness away from me or from my loved one, but rather committed time getting to know God.

Years ago, when I was a transitional deacon, one of my priestly mentors said to me that he wasn’t sure he believed in intercessory prayer. Essentially he was saying that we should not be praying to God for things, sending God requests to change our world. I found that strange and

had to really deeply consider it. There is a great anonymous quote that says, 'Prayer is not intended to change the will of God, but to discover it.' During the Civil War in the United States, President Abraham Lincoln was asked whether he thought God was on the side of the Union or of the side of the Confederacy. A man of faith, Lincoln said that he didn't know but he sure hoped he was on God's side! And there has been discussion around sporting competitions about what it means when both sides are praying to win. Counsel has been given that the prayer should rather be for good sportsmanship. Prayer is about getting to know God, and discovering God's will. So part of lives of faith is about prayer.

Which fulfills the first part of the Summary of the Law, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength; and love your neighbour as yourself.' Prayer and getting to know God better, to discover God's will, is the first part of that. And the second...well, it is about loving our neighbour.

Loving our neighbour means justice and kindness and mercy and humility. When we are mean to one another, when we talk badly about one another, when we are short or rude or make someone else feel badly we are not exhibiting that behaviour. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said that when one human being is mean or unkind to one another, God sheds a tear. That includes the way we treat people in our daily lives, our societal values, and our welcoming of those different from us. Compassion and mercy and welcome, in the coffee shop, at work, in the church, on our borders, welcoming immigrants whose lives are plagued with difficulties. And reaching out to those in need, the needy, the poor, the sick, the widow, the orphan, the hungry. How well do we do that? What do our lives of faith look like?

We have a great example in the church, for 2000 years! Common folk, like you and me, fishermen, left their nets and followed Jesus. Paul, a tent maker, Luke a physician, got it going early. And the early disciples gathered in homes to worship and pray. Wealthy women like Lydia and Priscilla sponsored much of the work of the early church. But it was informal and not organized and had to be clandestine. With the emperor Constantine's conversion in the fourth century and his making Christianity the official religion of the realm, the church was able to be public and free from persecution and took on a more formal shape, including the development of liturgy, somewhat as we have here today. Some of our challenges with rules and regulations came early with the Great Schism when the Orthodox and the Western Churches split. We Protestants like to believe that the Reformation was a much needed adjustment in a number of bad practices and abominations, and man made rules. And we believe that with justification.

There is a theme that has run through these two thousand years that continues to us here today. Whether you view it as the Summary of the Law, loving God and loving your neighbour, or like the prophet Micah, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God, the work is the same. We here at St. George's are the recipients of a rich tradition of that; inheritors of those gone before us. For it was in 1864 that the British Embassy recruited the Reverend William Campbell to come here as the first chaplain, and this building was built in 1925. A rich tradition with much good works and many lives of faith. Great faith. But that doesn't come from just showing up to church and from just sitting in the pews. It comes from people living, yes **living**, lives of faith.

Somebody made this place happen! Somebody introduced you to church! Showed you the value of a life of faith, a life of prayer. Are you carrying it on? What have you done? It won't continue without you. Without you doing something, doing, giving, being, praying. Does God

hear you prayerfully and frequently praying? Does God see you working for the mission of the Church? Does He see your life of faith? This is about being a church on the move!

What does a church on the move look like? Annie Dillard, an excellent contemporary religious and inspirational writer has written, "it is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews." And the Reverend Susan Metz writes, "Church is the perfect place to be stirring up the souls and understandings of all who come...that's how challenging, exciting, outrageous our worship should be." Jesus doesn't call us to sit on the sidelines. He calls us to roll up our sleeves and get to work helping the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden, widows (even like the persistent one in our gospel reading today!), and orphans. He calls us to be loving!

The question is not whether God will do God's part — but whether we will do our part...

I was recently given a sheet that says, 'The mark of a great church is not how many people come, but how many people live differently for having been there.' What is each one of us doing to see that people live differently for having been here? It depends on each and every one of us. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Will he find faith at St. George's?

Amen.

This next Friday we are having a Benefit Concert here at St. George's. While it will be great music and very entertaining, the focus is on **benefit!** Yes, a **benefit** concert. The singer is taking time out of her travel here to rehearse and be here and is donating her time and talents. The pianist is flying from the UK at his expense and donating his services and talents. I have been the chief architect and organizer and am donating my week's stipend to the benefit. Can you be generous, and whether you can come or not, donate, contribute, and help make this a success so that St. George's can continue its mission and thrive.

We do need help with underwriting of a couple of expenses. I would like to list the names of those that can be particularly generous in the program, and acknowledge them but I need to know by Wednesday before we print.

'When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? Will he find faith at St. George's?'