

Sermon on Sunday 7 August 2022

by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

(Readings: Isaiah 1. 1, 10-20 & Luke 12. 32-40)

Walk the Talk: Belief into Action



On the day of writing this address, I succeeded in obtaining my first Senior Railcard. I simply had to take a form with a few details to the station (less than a ten-minute walk from our house), pay the sum of 30 pounds and walk back with the said railcard. Easy, especially as I had filled in the form a month ago!

I simply was not getting round to actually going and getting the card. I cannot explain why. I guess that we all have this tendency to put some things off and instead prioritise and embrace other activities and relationships we enjoy or find less challenging. It can be funny. It can be annoying. And in cases of petrol/ house insurance/ barbecues, things can go

very wrong for ourselves, others and in fact our whole community.

In our first reading, things were going seriously wrong for Judah. You may or may not know that when King Solomon died, the ancient people of Israel were divided into two kingdoms. The Northern kingdom kept the name Israel whilst the Southern kingdom was called Judah. The prophet Isaiah was desperately trying to get the people in Judah to realise just **how bad** things were going. But they didn't get it. After all, they were the people of God, chosen to be blessed.

They had Jerusalem and the Temple, they made animal sacrifices and burned incense to God, they observed festivals and the Sabbath but, Isaiah reveals to them that God sees **all** these things and even their prayers as having **no** meaning. Why? Because what the people **do** and how they live in general, does not honour God. Instead, they honour many gods, they ignore the vulnerable and don't stand up to protect the oppressed. They are failing to live as God intended his people to live in a just society; where following his commands should mean that everyone be treated fairly and have a proper recognised place in the community (see verse 17).

Isaiah's vision was hard for ancient Israelites to take but it challenges us, too. It tells us 'loud and clear' that God does not see the practices of religion as being separate from the way we live day to day in community with others. God in speaking through Isaiah cuts to the chase: 'Walk the talk/ translate belief into action'.

Run the clock forward and Jesus is talking to the disciples about how to live in the time before the Son of man comes. 'Son of Man' is a term Jesus uses to describe himself - so it is about how to live before Jesus returns to earth again (although the disciples don't understand this at the time). Jesus gives them two guidelines and now they are **our** guidelines, too. Jesus says:

- where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, and
- be ready at all times

Lots of times, Jesus tries to warn against greed and hoarding wealth; if all our decision making and relationships are shaped by making money or wanting to have more, then this will fill our hearts and will push God out (see Luke 12. 33-34) and push others in an unjust community. And this is **not** a God who gives rules simply to challenge us and make life more difficult. Jesus says, it **is** God's '**good pleasure**' to give us the kingdom'; it is God's greatest wish that we should enjoy his blessings upon humanity. Just as in Isaiah, God wants a better way of living for his people; Jesus shows us that God wants us to have joy, goodness, peace. Part of this is that our blessing is to be a blessing to one another.

And when does all this begin? Now, says Jesus. I am here with you. I am telling you to be ready. I will leave you but, I will return. Be ready (Luke 12. 40).

³⁵ 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the

wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.

In this picture we are given an image of faithful service in the present. This means we are to live every day as if it will be the day of Jesus' return.

Often, we talk of Jesus's return as if it is an event in a sci-fi movie-way, an event in a future world we do not recognise, a doomsday to fear where we all be examined at a time of great catastrophe. Yet the emphasis here is all about living. In the words of another OT prophet, Micah: "What God is looking for in men and women, it's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously — take God seriously". The phrasing in The Message emphasises the simplicity of this 'mantra' to be applied in every area of our lives.

'Manyana' (or mañana), the Spanish word meaning tomorrow, can be used to convey 'tomorrow' or 'some other later time'. It is also often used to indicate an unspecified time in the future.

When we talk of Jesus' return, it can often have the ring of 'Manyana', but Jesus makes it clear; live each day as it may be the last, place me at the centre of your life and live in faith **and** service not 'manyana' - the indefinite tomorrow - but today.