



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Trinity XX 2024 8.30 am

Mark 10.17 - 31

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning's Gospel reading is another example of Jesus' turning the expected order of things upside down – he does it all the time.

Again and again, Jesus, seems to suggest that the way God sees things is not the way the world has come to see things.

Your way of doing things might look like this, Jesus says, but I'm afraid that how you see things - and how you do things - just won't wash with God. To paraphrase the great Welsh priest poet R S Thomasⁱ, *"in God's Kingdom, there are quite different things going on"*!

So, to the rather smug man who asks Jesus what he must do to be admitted into God's Kingdom and then reels off a list of all the good things he has done, Jesus says, "Well, that may be all fine and dandy, but are you sure that you are not hiding something else behind this model list of doing all the right things?"

Jesus hits a nerve when he tells the man that, no matter what he does, there might be just one thing that he doesn't do that he needs to do: address a self-understanding that his identity somehow depends on his total reliance on his wealth.

Well, the questioner might have gone away with his tail between his legs, but Jesus drives home the point by saying to his disciples - who have indeed given everything up to follow him - that those who rely on their wealth and influence and power - will never be part of God's Kingdom, no matter how many good things they do, because in God's Kingdom there are quite different things going on. Indeed, in God's Kingdom the last shall be first and the first shall be last; every expectation, every long-held view about how things should be done, is completely upended, everything is turned upside down and inside out.

That "the last shall be first and the first shall be last", is the text we chose for the wall plaque erected on the new staircase to the Crypt to help us put into context all the other fine plaques and memorials which cover the walls of this parish church.

The marble and the bronze and the brass all talk about the endeavours, sometimes heroic endeavours, of the rich and the famous: Colonial Governors, Generals in the Army, Admirals in the Royal Navy, Members of both Houses of Parliament, including the odd Prime Minister here and there, and the list goes on and on.

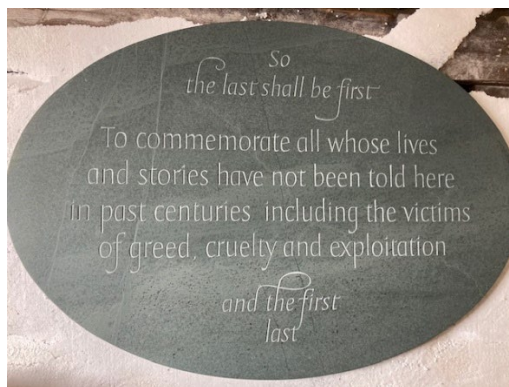
Yes, many if not all of those who are remembered here, like the man who came to Jesus, lived exemplary lives by the standards and expectations of their day: their achievements and their deeds

are recorded and writ large, but their memorials mention nothing of their trafficking in human lives across the Atlantic, of the misery endured by women , children and men on their plantations, of the conditions in which their servants worked here in the grand houses of this parish and in their even grander houses in the countryside; there is no mention of the conditions or hours their workers had to endure in the factories they owned or the colonies they governed.

And before we think we can get away Scot—free, Jesus turns his glance to each one of us and says, “So, what is the one thing that is holding you back from following me? What is the one thing that you need to change in your life before you are ready to enter God’s Kingdom?”

Just as it was for the man who cam to Jesus, it might just be the most important question any of us is ever asked.

Amen.



qv. <https://interruptingthesilence.com/2021/10/10/whats-your-one-thing-a-sermon-on-mark-1017-31/> (not cited in the homily).

ⁱ Thomas, R S, *The Kingdom*

It's a long way off but inside it
There are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time and admission
Is free, if you purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.



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