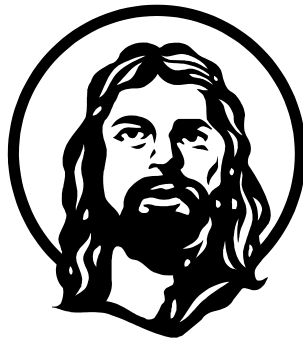


**St George the Martyr  
Shirley  
Lent Course 2011**

**THE TEACHING OF JESUS**

**Sundays at 5 45p.m. (Refreshments in Choir Vestry)  
for 6p.m. to 7p.m. in the Lady Chapel:**

**March 20th - GOD AS FATHER - Rev Carol Jones & Melvin Demmen**



**1. References: St Matthew Chapter 6 verses 25-35** - Jesus tells us not to be over-anxious, because the Father will care for us. **St Mark Chapter 14 verse 36** - Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, prays to Abba/Father. **The Letter to the Hebrews Chapter 4 verse 16** - Approaching God with boldness. **St Paul's Letter to the Roman Christians Chapter 8 verse 15-** Abba/Father. **Galatians 4 verse 6** - Children of God. **St Luke Chapter 11 verse 2: Our Father...**

2. For some, at both ends of the human wisdom spectrum, thinking of God as Father...or actually Daddy....comes as easily and naturally as it came to Jesus. Children get there easily: snug at the centre of their little world (if they are blessed with the right family, in all the rich diversity of families, and the right circumstances) they find nothing odd in the concept of the Creator of the Universe taking a close personal interest in their daily welfare. Others, really struggle with this concept—either because life doesn't feel that way, or because they focus on billions of people, billions of stars, billions of miles, billions of years, and see no place for a father/child relationship with the power (if any) behind all this enormity.

3. Jesus did not invent the parent/child relationship as a picture of the relationship between God and us. He worked within the Jewish tradition that he inherited from his mother, as no doubt within the unique tradition gifted by His Father. He did, however, give it a new emphasis: a new centrality. So much so that the German scholar Joachim Jeremias, challenged to find one word to sum up the central message of the New Testament, chose ABBA = FATHER. In St Matthew Chapter 10 verse 30, Jesus illustrated God the Father's attention to human detail by saying to his disciples "And even the hairs of your head are all counted". (Substitute the cells of your bodies if you are follicly challenged and have increasingly less or nothing to count in the matter of hair.) The Jesus picture of God is of someone ("It" really doesn't work) who is indeed concerned about the big and on-going story of the universe, but is also concerned with the individual details of the almost infinite numbers of small human stories.

4. This concern for detail is perhaps not so odd as it sometimes seems. We know from observing the universe that there is an incredible (well, not incredible, because it is there to see it, but hugely surprising) concern for detail and diversity. The variety of snowflakes, the variety of human finger prints, the varieties of zebra stripes, the diversity now being discovered and explored in heavenly bodies, are not what you would get from a creation conveyor belt churning out standard original or evolutionary models. We also see this concern for the individual in the best leaders, teachers, generals, who spot and respond to the individual who really hadn't expected (or maybe wanted) to be noticed. We certainly see it in fathers and mothers, who, in the midst of so many and great troubles and pre-occupations, note, care about, and respond to the childish details. In Celtic prayer tradition, where lighting the fire, milking the cow, stepping out of the door, going to bed, are offered to the Lord in prayer, God's Fatherly/Motherly attention to detail is marked and celebrated... In the nicest possible way it is taken for granted.



5. A close relationship with God that can be described in terms of Father/Child or Mother/Child carries major implications not just for how we picture God, but for how we respond to God. This sort of relationship doesn't fit easily with a "When I feel like it" approach to prayer, Bible reading, church attendance! Fathers and Mothers don't fit parenting into those few idle moments when they can't think of anything better to do. Children lose rather a lot if they just take their parents for granted, and turn their minds to their parents only when the television isn't working. Jesus was keen to emphasise that - having acknowledged our Father in heaven (and on earth - the Kingdom isn't "up there somewhere"), our response should be in terms of Love, Trust, and Fear (or maybe the better translation is Respect). As C S Lewis put it in the Narnia series, Aslan isn't a tame lion...and nor is the King from whom Aslan comes anything less than a King.



6. Of course, it is possible to read into the Father terminology the idea of the father who cares passionately about his own family, but really doesn't care about those outside that family. The Jews of the Old Testament did from time to time, and not least in the major prophets, recognise God as FATHER OF ALL; but at other times they thought they were dealing with a tribal god/father, whose role was to get everybody else out the way..or if they came in it was to serve the family that they were unlucky enough to be excluded from. The Christian Church has sometimes lapsed into the same narrow view of the Father's role: Jesus as chaplain to a pious club, and the Father as the honorary president of that club. Christians who go down that road are, as some of the contributors to the York Course put it, not standing within the Kingdom looking out, but standing outside the Kingdom and missing the whole point of what the Kingdom is. St Paul in his letter to the Ro-

mans had to talk both his Jewish compatriots and the gentile Christians of Rome out of the sort of jealousy and resentment that comes when someone new is admitted to the family and also receives the father or mother's love.



7.
  - *What God terminology comes most easily to you: Father? Mother? Lord? King? Creator?*
  - *Is the parent/child terminology an insult to human dignity, or the basis of human dignity?*
  - *Can we accept that Father knows best?*
  - *He who believes without any reason for believing may be in love with his own fancies?*
  - *If God is our Father, what implications does this have for us, his children?*
8. ***A Celtic fire-lighting prayer: God, as I kindle this fire, kindle a fire of your love in my heart.***

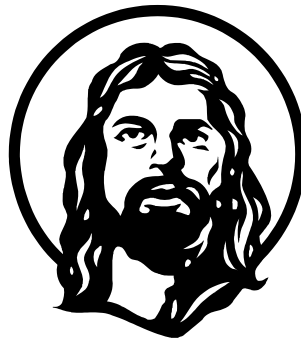


**St George the Martyr  
Shirley  
Lent Course 2011**

**THE TEACHING OF JESUS**

**GOOD FRIDAY (22 APRIL) 12 noon - 2p.m.**

**FORGIVENESS: Rev David Frost & Tony Healy**

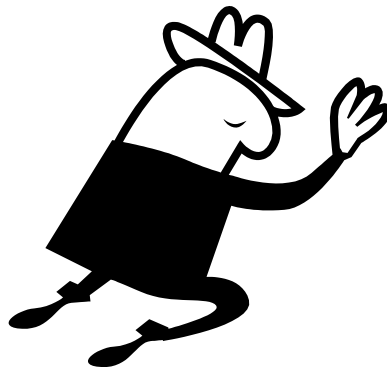


**1. References: St Matthew's Gospel Chapter 6 verses 5-15** - If you forgive others, God will forgive you. If you don't forgive others, God will not forgive you. **St Matthew's Gospel Chapter 26 verse 28** - This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **St Matthew's Gospel Chapter 5 verses 38-48** - Turn the other cheek. **St Matthew's Gospel Chapter 18 verses 21-35** - Forgiving 77 times (or 490 times). **St Luke's Gospel Chapter 23 34** - **Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.** **Acts Chapter 6 verse 60** - Stephen dies asking forgiveness for his murderers. **St Paul's Letter to the Christians of Colossae Chapter 3 verses 12-14** - Forgive one another.

2. The word forgiveness or the concept of forgiveness appears about 14 times in the course of the 10 o'clock service, more when the hymns touch on forgiveness. As the references above show, Jesus had a lot to say about forgiveness. So did the Old Testament, and not least the Psalms. The Psalm writers were very conscious of individual and collective sin, and therefore of individual and collective need for forgiveness. When Solomon dedicated the first Temple, he saw it as a place to which the nation could go, admit to wrongdoing, and ask forgiveness. Much of the sacrificial system was geared to seeking and receiving forgiveness.

3. Why such emphasis? The Bible, Old Testament and New, is about relationships, and forgiveness is basic to relationships. Steve Chalke, in the York Course discussions, tells of saying in a radio phone-in that the most important thing in marriage is communication, and being corrected by a lady with far more experience of marriage than he had. The lady said that forgiveness mattered most, counted for most. She pointed out that a couple might have crystal-clear communication with each other, but if what was communicated was unforgiveness the marriage was over. The unforgiven does not have to be big stuff. It can be the daily multitude of small resented grievances that destroys the relationship: like the smallish boy who took seriously forgiving 77 times (the alternative translation of 490 was way beyond him), but kept the score against his brother, and - with great relief and virtuous satisfaction - lashed out when peccadillo number 78 was reached. That story, of course, also raises the vexed issue of what forgiveness is, and of the relationship between forgiving and forgetting.

4. If we are keeping the score, it is easy to build up a very large total of sinned against occasions in the average week, and equally to reckon up an impressive total of occasions on which we didn't quite measure up to the exacting standard of doing all that we should have done for God, and of not doing all that we should not have done. As the old Prayer Book confession says, we have done wrong and failed to do right to such an extent that "there is no health in us". (That concept of our apparently white robes of virtue being dirty rags goes back to the Old Testament prophets, who stood back in awe from the holiness of God, and took seriously the command "to be holy even as I (God) am holy".)



5. The New Testament is much more explicit than the Old Testament about the very explicit link between forgiving and being forgiven. It is there at the heart of the Lord's Prayer, and as Matthew gives the prayer that Jesus taught he goes on to quote Jesus rubbing it in by saying immediately afterwards "And if you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven". Jesus knew his Psalms, and knew therefore the powerful technique of repeating the same message in a slightly different way as a means of reinforcement.

6. It could be that when we say the Lord's Prayer (and if we attend the 8 a.m. Service on Sunday mornings we say it twice in the same service on most Sundays), we tend to skip over the "as we forgive those who sin against us" bit of the sentence, and major on the "forgive us our sins" part. (The word is trespass in the Prayer Book service. Both words mean "falling short" or "missing the mark", which might just ring bells if you are a very bad darts player, and would certainly ring bells if you were an archer.) It could be also that we tend to think of sin as the really big and awful stuff that somebody else does, and to class our own misdemeanours as not quite in the sin category. That King David, with adultery followed by murder, had something to apologise for. We are not in the same league. It is interesting that the Prophet Nathan (with extraordinary courage) brought his sins home to David by getting the King angry on behalf of the poor man who had his one sheep pinched for a guest supper by a rich man. Probably this happened fairly regularly, but David - to his credit - had a sensitive conscience. That is no bad thing, provided we don't go on to be neurotic: e.g. respectfully polishing our Bible before reading it, instead of just blowing the dust off it.



7. The Church's teaching on repentance and forgiveness is very clear in some ways, but not so clear in other ways. The simple aspect is in the comforting words that if we truly repent, God will fully forgive. In Baptism and Confirma-

tion, we are asked, to repent and to turn to Christ, and we say a loud Yes. So that's it, then? Again, it is good to look at the same time at our need to be forgiven and our need to forgive. It is particularly tough to forgive somebody who has wronged you if the other party seems blissfully unaware that there is a problem, or is still in possession of something that they took from you. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was so powerful because it did ask for confession and repentance, and a change of heart, leading on to forgiveness. Often the damage could not be undone (27 years on Devil's Island can't be given back to someone), but recognition that the wrong was a wrong helps. The South African (former) students who have just apologised for their disgraceful treatment of Black South Africans paid the penalty of public confession and humiliation. It is rather optimistic to ask God for forgiveness for something you carry on doing, without even an attempt at "amendment of life".

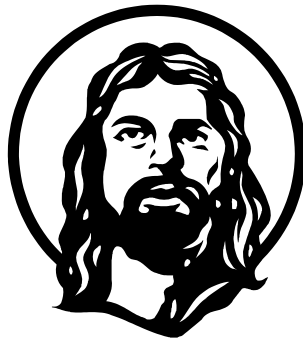
8. So repentance might mean showing sorry as well as being sorry. And then there is the question of the relationship between saying sorry and seeking forgiveness in our own prayers, saying and seeking in church on Sundays, confession in the presence of a priest and absolution/forgiveness pronounced by a priest (in public or in private) and those occasions when everybody present prays for forgiveness and no priest pronounces it. We may also have lingering doubts about whether all the sins confessed and forgiven during a long life of mixed virtue and vice are still kept on the record, and are there to be accounted for when we die. (Jesus' invitation to Paradise to the penitent thief seemed pretty unconditional!)

9. *How do we personally understand the relationship between the Cross and our forgiveness? Why is forgiveness so important (and so hard)? Bitterness (including bitterness against our self) locks us into the past: forgiveness frees us for the future? Do you find it hard to forgive yourself? Do you find it hard to forgive God? Can we actually forgive someone for what they did to someone other than ourselves? Is there a place for forgiveness in international relations? How did you feel when Tony Blair apologised for our slave-trading history?*



**St George the Martyr  
Shirley  
Lent Course 2011**

THE TEACHING OF JESUS  
Sundays at 5 45p.m. (Refreshments in Choir Vestry)  
for 6p.m. to 7p.m. in the Lady Chapel:  
March 27th - HEAVEN AND HELL - Rev David Frost & Ray Wheeler



**1. References: St Matthew Chapter 18 verses 1-9** - Jesus says that the humility of children is an entry point to the Kingdom, rather than the arrogance of many adults. He also points to the reality of hell fire, and the sort of conduct that gets you there. **St Matthew Chapter 25 verses 31-46** - The famous sheep and goats passage. The invitation to eternal life goes to those who have seen need and tried, according to their resources, to meet that need. **The 1st Letter of St John Chapter 1 verses 8-9** - The reality of sin...and not just in other people. **The 1st Letter of St Paul to the Christians of Thessalonica Chapter 5 verses 6-7** - We have opportunities and responsibilities to seize and live up to.

2. Most people have heard of "hell fire" sermons. Probably most people who read these notes will not have heard a hell fire sermon? This isn't just about then and now, though earlier generations heard much more talk about hell than we hear, and saw many more pictures of hell (including church wall paintings) than we do. Some of the religious best sellers today in the USA are about hell. One of the most popular is by a female pastor who is convinced that Jesus took her on a personal tour of hell, to see (and indeed experience) all the flesh burning, maggot munching, etc that goes on there for endless

years as punishment for those who sinned and hadn't got round to repenting before the grim reaper intervened. You can argue that it is no bad thing that, at least at St George's, children are no longer scared into virtue by tales of things even more horrible than the things they have sometimes wished on their siblings. On the other hand, you can also argue that it is not a good thing that we now tend to take heaven for granted, because there is no designated alternative to heaven.

3. One of the memorable quotes in the York Course notes is "God cannot prevent us from going to Hell and staying there if that is what we insist on". (W H Auden) On the theme of taking both heaven and hell seriously, and not just taking the former for granted, C S Lewis is quoted at length - specifically his sermon "The Weight of Glory". Lewis says: *It is a serious thing to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption which you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long, we are in some degree, helping each other to one of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people."*

4. It is probably a mistake to think of their being clocks ticking away in heaven and hell. After all, we are creatures who can find an extended period of happiness a little boring, and who find an extended period of suffering insufferable. But what Christianity claims is that, in whatever form, human beings will outlast the universe as we now know it (or the last in the succession of universes, if the present universe is not the first or not the last material universe). On that basis, the C S Lewis quotation bears close thought.



5. It is interesting, though not really surprising, that the distinguished Christians who were asked for the York Course to say whether they accepted the notions of heaven and hell all said Yes; but when they were asked to picture heaven and hell actually said very little. The gist of what they said (paraphrase rather than quotation) is that:

- This life is not the end of our story.
- In terms of information about what we have to look forward to after our present life, we have the words of Jesus, the promise of Jesus, the example of Jesus, and above all the love of Jesus.
- The Bible pictures of heaven and hell are good inasmuch as heaven is presented as lacking all the drawbacks (loss, pain, separation, disability) of this life, and hell is presented as being separation from God. However, once the Bible writers try to picture what does go on in heaven and in hell, they frankly lack credibility.
- Heaven is a gift of the loving God not an achievement of the righteous man or woman: the best of us would have a fair number of black marks to offset our gold stars if someone were counting these things. However, our good and our bad deeds do have consequences; and the response to unconditional love ought to be wholehearted service, not deliberately piling up the sins so that God has more to forgive!
- We need a sense of guilt accompanied by penitence, and a sense of forgiveness.
- Whether hell is empty or full, we have no means of knowing. However, we can usefully devote our lives to supporting the Christ work of directing ourselves and others away from hell and towards heaven. Like Peter, we have keys to use, however inadequate to the task we and the keys may seem.

6. It is one of the sharpest criticisms of Christians that they are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use. It can also be said of Christians with a hell fixation that they go sadly off the rails when they judge other people to be hell fodder, and write them off as being beyond redemption. The Jesus model is one of lining up with the marginalised, including those whose behaviour makes them unattractive, and working for their good. If Christ died for me, he died for the singularly unpleasant person I am minded to walk round, or past or over. The dying Christ offered a passport to paradise to the dying man next to him, who evidently hadn't lived a life of unblemished virtue...and who knew it.

7. The relationship between behaviour and heaven and hell is not straightforward. If it were, there would be no room for forgiveness and grace...and apparently no point in the Crucifixion. The Caswall/Tallis hymn "My God I love thee" (Hymn 453) is not a bad way of looking at the issues:-

*My God, I love thee: not because I hope for heav'n thereby,  
Nor yet because who love thee not are lost eternally.  
Thou, O my Jesus, thou didst me upon the Cross embrace;  
For me didst bear the nails and spear, and manifold disgrace....*

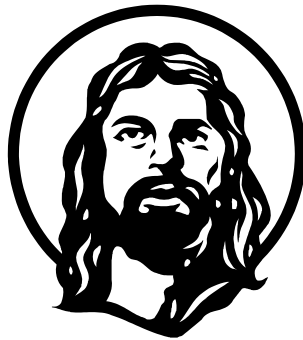
*Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,  
Should I not love thee well?  
Not for the sake of winning heav'n,  
Nor of escaping hell.*

*Not from the hope of gaining aught,  
Not seeking a reward;  
But as thyself hast loved me,  
O ever-loving Lord....*



- 8.
- *What picture, if any, do you have of heaven or hell?*
  - *Is it presumptuous or trusting to believe that you are "bound for glory"?*
  - *How do you understand the parable of the sheep and the goats?*
  - *Does the Church (our bit of it) keep too quiet about hell?*
  - *When a child asks "Where has Granddad gone, what do you say?"*

**St George the Martyr  
Shirley  
Lent Course 2011**  
THE TEACHING OF JESUS  
**Sundays at 5 45p.m. (Refreshments in Choir Vestry)  
for 6p.m. to 7p.m. in the Lady Chapel:**  
**April 10th - ON BEING HUMAN - Rev Andrew Dovey and Karen Dovey**



**1. References:** **St Mark Chapter 7 verses 14-23** - Jesus gives behaviour priority over dietary laws. **St Luke Chapter 11 verses 9-12** - Human beings carry God's image, though sometimes that image is rather clouded. Human relationships and the God relationship matter. **St John Chapter 10 verses 7-10** - Sheep and shepherd. **St Paul's 2nd Letter to the Christians of Corinth Chapter 5 verse 7** - We walk by faith not sight. **Genesis Chapter 1 verse 26**—Let us make humankind in our likeness, according to our image.

2. "A Tale of Two Cities" is best remembered for two quotes: 1) "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times", and 2) "It is a far far better thing I do than I have ever done before". That's human beings for you. The rest of Creation isn't really good or bad: it is just the way it is. Human beings reach the extremes of virtue and vice; and not just different human beings (the saint end of the spectrum and the sinner end of the spectrum), but the same human being. Bible heroes show this (and challenge the adage that "You can't change human nature"): Abraham passes his wife off as his sister to save his own skin. Moses commits murder. David commits adultery and murder. Peter lets his Master down. All four also showed their heroic potential, and their faith in the God who had called them to His service.

3. Jesus and the Bible are very realistic about human nature; and the Psalms reflect every aspect of human nature - from despair to sublime hope, from hatred to love, from vengeance to forgiveness, from trust to emptiness...often in a few lines. Jesus was optimistic about what the grace of God could do with human nature, including what grace could do with the collection of misfits he chose for his inner team. He made a special point (particularly as Luke records the story) of reaching out to those on whom the judgmental world had given up: tax collectors, prostitutes, notorious sinners, hated foreigners. Jesus didn't turn his back on moral standards, but he refused to turn his back on those who had infringed conventional moral standards. (His Church hasn't always been so good at making this distinction.) He also highlighted the fact that Pride can be a greater barrier between us and God and us and each other than the sins that get your name printed in the tabloids.

4. Ever since Jesus dropped in on Zacchaeus for tea, he has been visiting people's homes for tea and transformation. That says a lot about Jesus, and also a lot about our ministry - though we need to do more listening than Jesus did, because most of us lack his intuition, and maybe we need to do less talking, because we don't necessarily have his wisdom or his words. (The message is that many first meet the gracious God in the gracious neighbour - not in the preachy neighbour.) St Francis met Jesus in the leper. We can meet Jesus in the unremarkable man or woman at the bus stop...and there may not be another opportunity.



5. It is sometimes easier to think through the implications for being human of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, when sitting in church on Sunday morning, with a decent gap between you and the person in

the next pew, than to live through those implications in the family, in the work-  
place, in the shopping place, at the bus stop.

*Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,  
Lord, in the suffering this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children, justice, joy peace,  
Sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase.*

*Shelter for fragile lives,  
Cures for their ills,  
Work for the craftsmen,  
Trade for their skills.  
Land for the dispossessed,  
Rights for the weak,  
Voices to plead the cause  
Of those who can't speak.*

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,  
Give us compassion, we pray,  
Melt our cold hearts,  
Let tears fall like rain.  
Come change our love  
From a spark to a flame.*

*(Graham Kendrick - Hymn 54)*

6. We are individuals, utterly unique, and in some ways utterly alone: at times we feel that aloneness. At the same time, we are members one of another, and together. The invitation at the Eucharist to come to the altar is about that togetherness, just as the Last Supper was a bringing together round broken bread for that diverse group of individuals (the named men and the un-named women) who were shortly to be scattered, leaving Jesus alone yet not alone. At Baptism, the individual is baptised into the community of the Church, though sometimes it is quite hard to capture that either visibly/physically, or in what happens thereafter. *How, as individuals, do we live out collectively our collective responsibility as the Body of Christ?*

7. Jesus made us a promise that "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". (St John Chapter 8 verse 12) There are plenty of examples, maybe in our own lives as well, of the reality of that light - though it doesn't always feel like that, and many great Christians have experienced "the dark night of the soul". (It can be quite hard to "walk in the light" when your current feeling is "Blimey, it's gone out!") The longing for light hymn finishes with another appeal for the right relationship between the individual and the group:

*Many the gifts, many the people,  
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
Making your kingdom come.*

*(Bernadette Farrell Hymn 401)*

8. The York Course notes tell two stories of lives being changed. One is of a prisoner being released to the un-soothing prediction of a prison officer "You'll be back!" The prisoner did come back, but he came back as a member of staff! In time, that man was ordained as a Church of England priest. This philosophy, and this experience of the transforming love of Christ, has a lot to say to parents, teachers, priests, friends, about seeing potential in apparently unpromising people and persisting in trying to help bring out that potential. Jesus saw something in Nathaniel that nobody else had seen, and that Nathaniel had not seen in himself.

*9. The young man whose father had died, said to a friend "I got through that without God!" Was he right? Do we need theology to make sense of being human? Does humanism respect humanity more than Christianity does? How do you rate yourself as a new creation? How do you rate St George's as [part of] the Body of Christ in Shirley?*



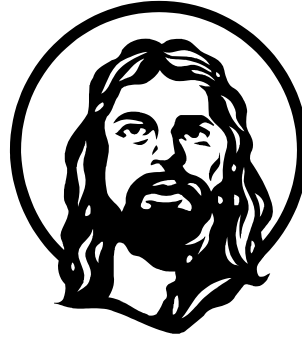


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Shirley  
Lent Course 2011**

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

**Sundays at 5 45p.m. (Refreshments in Choir Vestry)  
for 6p.m. to 7p.m. in the Lady Chapel:**

**March 13th - MONEY - Supported by Melva Brown & Brian McGinnis**



1. **References: St Luke Chapter 8 verses 14-15** - Jesus warns against being absorbed with money, or with anxieties about money. **St Luke Chapter 12 verses 27-34** - Jesus warns against pre-occupation with money, reminds us that God feeds the ravens, and asks us to focus on what really matters. **St Paul's 1st Letter to the Christians in Corinth Chapter 16 verse 2** - Paul encourages Sunday collections in Corinth for famine relief in Palestine. **St Paul's 2nd Letter to the Christians in Corinth Chapter 8 verses 8-15** - Paul pursues the same theme. He points out that Christ became poor for our sakes. (Think hard about this one.) He promotes the idea of balance: if you have a lot of money, you need to think about sharing with those who have very little. He talks about striking a fair balance: a message to be heard from modern politicians and economists, and preachers. *"Live simply, so that others may simply live"?*

2. The world of the first century was very different from our world in many ways, but we can exaggerate the differences. There were then huge differences between the very rich and the very poor. There still are - in terms of both assets and income. There were then a great number of people who lived "close to the margins", though at that time this meant daily wages just about

adequate to feed the family for the next day, whereas today it tends to mean weekly income just about adequate for the week. At that time money meant power: rich people were not only able to buy goods, they could buy themselves out of trouble, and they enjoyed privileges, including access to "justice" denied to poor people. Any change? At that time, there were taxes to pay, both to Church (Temple) and State (Roman occupation). We have local and central taxes but no Church tax. (The Church of England does not get Government funds.) At that time, more people fed themselves than is the case in this country now, but - especially in the towns - most people had to buy their daily bread and the other daily necessities. Jesus must have spent his first 30 years earning his living to support his mother/family. Once he took to the road as an itinerant preacher, the "common purse" held by Judas for the group must have been replenished by supporters. Divine reality was not totally detached from economic reality.

3. Musical theatre and ordinary theatre have both had powerful things to say about the corrosive effect of riches and of poverty, or rather of having to/choosing to focus on getting/keeping riches, to the exclusion of everything else, or having to/choosing to focus on getting/keeping enough money to stay alive, to the exclusion of everything else. The man working long hours to fund his mansion and his Porsche may see as little of his family, and have as little time to be a good neighbour, as the man working long hours to feed his children.



4. There are two sets of issues for the Christian thinking about stewardship of money. First there are the principles we should follow, and then there are the practicalities. If your principle were to sell all that you owned and give all your money to the poor, you would clearly find that in practice you had nothing left and would be poor yourself. This is the principle to which Jesus called his im-

mediate followers, which was found in the Early Church, and which is the calling of some Christians today. In many religious orders, you own nothing, not even your own clothes. From having been a high earner, you may become a beggar...and if your begging is unsuccessful you may not eat that day. A more universally applicable Christian principle is **“It’s not a matter of how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God’s money I keep for myself”**. (John Stott, who set out this principle lives in the College of St Barnabas in Lingfield, where Rev John Worsfold and Rev Peter Windridge, both priests in this parish at one time, now live.) This principle is an excellent starting point. It doesn’t of itself determine how you share out that amount of God’s resources that has been entrusted to you and your family. The practical difficulties are well summed up in the saying **“The last corner of a person to be converted is likely to be their pocket/purse”**.

5. Jean Vanier founded the international L’Arche movement, based on Gospel principles, in which people without intellectual impairment live and work side by side with people with intellectual impairment. The latter tend by necessity to be relatively poor financially. The former have chosen, to be in solidarity with the latter, to be relatively poor. However, there is great diversity in living L’Arche. In this country at least, the assistants’ earnings tend to be higher than the disabled people’s benefits; and not all the assistants actually live in community. A married assistant with a family to support has to think hard about financial priorities: how far can you legitimately choose to make your family poor. Not all L’Arche assistants and leaders earn the same salary. Jean Vanier (who had a privileged background before he changed his life style) said of personal finances and decision-making: **“We all have to choose between two ways of being crazy: the foolishness of the Gospel and the nonsense of the values of the world.”**

6. Tithing is a good entry point for thinking through the practicalities of Christian giving principles. The Old Testament tithe is 10% of your income, though it is worth noting that in Old Testament times that 10% was supplemented by additional freewill offering. It was not the sum total of what you gave to God’s work. 10% seems like a good straightforward rule that can apply to anyone. It obviously means that different people will give different amounts. If you earn £100 a week, you give £10. If you earn £1,000 a week, you give £100. But is that actually fair? In the £100 case, you are left with only £90 to live on. In the

£1,000 case, you are left with £900 for your personal use. If you are very rich - say £100,000 a week - you will hardly notice your 10% give-away, since you have so much left. Then at the practical level: 10% of gross earnings; 10% of earnings net of tax; 10% of earnings net of tax and rent/mortgage interest; 10% of money not committed to essentials? What are essentials?

7. One of the contributors to the York Course discussion papers does tithe from what goes into the bank (i.e. net of tax), and this goes to the local church and selected charities. He then makes freewill offerings as opportunity offers. Another contributor tries to give away an equivalent amount every time he spends on non-essentials. This approach does help you to keep thinking about priorities: £100 spent on a celebration meal, £100 to Christian Aid. Where you have family responsibilities, your giving choices have to be family choices, not purely personal choices.

8. Individual Christians have to think hard about stewardship: giving to their local church and giving to good causes and direct spending on people they wish to support...and there are related expenses such as Christian training courses or Christian study books. Local churches have to think hard about stewardship of their financial and other resources. For example, how much of the local church income goes to overseas missions; how are fund-raising events shared between the church roof, church vestments and e.g. Christian Aid? (In an earlier century, would-be robbers demanded that a priest bring out his church's treasures. He brought out some elderly and disabled people, and some children. That church had no material treasures!)



9. *How do you tackle stewardship? How should we balance planned giving and spontaneous giving? How do you feel about church quotas (the money we pay to the diocese to be shared around)? Is tithing a good thing?*

February 2011.