

**Saturday December 4th**

**Matthew 9:35-10:1**

In verse 35 we have a neat summary of the ministry of Jesus. He was a teacher. For Matthew this was not just someone who passed on certain information about the Kingdom. As a teacher, Jesus showed by his teaching what the Kingdom meant in their daily lives. This is why it seemed that he taught them with authority. He was also a teacher by the way he lived and the way he carried out his ministry. In Jesus they met the Kingdom in action. He was a herald. In the ancient world the herald was the person who brought a message from the King. In the Gospel we see that the message Jesus is proclaiming comes from God his Father. As with his teaching, the message that was preached by Jesus had a power and an authority about it because of its divine origins. Finally, Jesus was a healer. The Gospels present the miracles of Jesus in such a way that they elaborate on his teaching and give a clear witness to the meaning of the coming of the Kingdom. People are set free by the miracles. They are given the chance to begin again, which is found in his call to repentance and the promise of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus then moves to address his disciples, passing on to them the ministry which he himself had received from the Father. The leaders of the Jews had failed in their ministry, leaving the people like sheep without a shepherd.

This is a special section of the Gospel because in it we have a clear glimpse into how Jesus sees the people around him. In our English Bibles, we are told that Jesus is "moved with pity" upon seeing the crowds, but that is nowhere near the Greek word. In Greek the word used is from the word for "bowels", which in the ancient world represented the deepest depths of a person's whole being. We can presume that what has moved him here are the people who were listening to him preaching and teaching, heralding the Good News and receiving the blessings of his miracles. He was moved by their suffering. He was overcome with compassion and mercy for their stumbling around in darkness and fear, for seeing them caught up in the pain of sin and uncertainty and under the power of incompetent and wicked shepherds. If there was ever a message of great joy for the greatest of sinners among us, it is the thought that Jesus is "moved with compassion" for us. This is what leads him to offer us forgiveness and mercy. It is because he cares and loves us so much.

*Prayer*

Loving God, ever lasting Father, we thank you that you have given us a share in your love through the person and ministry of your Son Jesus. Show us how to share that love with others.

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## **BIBLE STUDIES NOVEMBER 2010**

**+ Michael Hough**



## LANTERN SERIES

*After the General Synod of 2001 the Bishop of Ballarat invited Anglicans throughout the Diocese to spend time in reflecting on the role the Scriptures play in the life of Anglicans and to take part in Bible studies and Bible reflections for General Synod 2004. This mandate now continues for the Mission of the Diocese.*

The Scriptures are the Word of God and in them we can not only discover God's teaching and his wonderful works of salvation down through the ages in the lives of his people, but we can also hear God speaking to us in our own varied situations. It is a living word that when read with eyes of faith brings us into a deeper relationship with God.

This Lantern Series of studies follows through the Gospel reading from the daily Eucharist as set down in the Australian lectionary. By reading these each day we are in a prayerful manner joining with people around the world as they gather for the daily Mass.

Each study is in three parts. Some background study of the text, opening up details and background that will help the reader to come closer to what the Gospel writer may have had in mind. An analysis of what possible meaning could the writing have to people seeking to live out lives of discipleship in the world today? And each study ends with a short prayer which may help us to ground the reading in our spiritual lives. It is to be hoped that as the people work through the texts they will be led to present their meditations to God in prayers of their own.

What is important is that adequate time is put aside each day to read the Bible texts before we work on the studies. Through familiarity with the language of the Bible and direct contact with the stories we will find ourselves growing in confidence as we study. To do them justice it would also be helpful to include a little extra time for reflection and prayer. The texts themselves are also suitable for discussion groups and over time will help give an introduction into various methods of biblical studies.

The Lantern Series is an initiative of the Diocese of Ballarat. These studies are also available at the start of each month at the diocesan web page at [www.ballaratanglican.org.au](http://www.ballaratanglican.org.au)

### Friday December 3rd

### Matthew 9:27-31

This story has some elements that are similar to the story of the blind men at Jericho (20:29-34). In both of these Matthew uses the title "Son of David" for Jesus. This is not a surprise given that the people of the time were waiting for the promised messiah. He would come from the line of David and would restore them to their freedom, to glory and to greatness and he would be known by his powerful actions and teachings. Given the miracles that were being performed, it is not surprising that the people saw in Jesus signs of this messianic ministry. There were two blind men outside the house of Jairus. This would have been a normal thing as one would support the other in their travels and their begging. Jesus ignores their cries because again he seems to wish to avoid the possibility of the people wanting to make him a messiah who would fit into their own expectations. It is only when he reaches the house that he turns and addresses them. They come to him asking for mercy, mercy that would be expressed in terms of healing them of their blindness. Jesus sets out the terms for this gift: faith in his ability to perform the cure. Once they express that faith, Jesus touches their eyes and they can see again. The way the story is presented here, it is not the faith that performs the miracle. It is the precondition necessary before the miracle can happen. As is common in the Gospel, Jesus tries to limit news of his power from being spread throughout the countryside, presumably to stop people from pursuing their own messianic agendas.

At first it seems a little strange that Jesus does not immediately cure the men of their blindness. He waits. If we read the dialogue correctly, it may well be that he is trying to encourage them to assess just how strongly they want to be cured. As with the sick man in John chapter 5 he seems to be asking them: "Do you want to be cured?". That may sound strange but there was a certain security in begging. They had no work, no debts to pay off, no responsibilities and received charity from lots of people. Not a perfect life but one with which they could have become comfortable. Not unlike some of our sins! Remember the prayer of St Augustine: "Lord heal me. But not just yet!". He wanted to begin a new life, but still had a few good sinful ways he wanted to enjoy for a bit longer. The demands of the Gospel are that we repent **now**. This is not an option that we can exercise when we like or when it is convenient.

**Prayer** Heavenly Father, we are often blind to your will in our lives. Help us to turn from our sinfulness and seek the healing powers of your forgiveness that we may be free and at peace.

**Thursday December 2nd**

**Matthew 7:21-27**

Jesus now moves to directing the disciples towards taking action on all that he has said. He has warned them about the dangers of false teachers and now points out the danger of them deceiving themselves about their standing in the Kingdom. In a beautiful image, he notes that the gates of Heaven are not set up to be automatically opened when someone calls out "Lord, Lord". They respond only to those who go out and actually perform the will of God. This is the will of his Father. He goes on to make this point very clear. Even if someone were to perform great works in the name of Jesus, performing exorcisms and miracles with divine authority, it is not enough to qualify them for entrance into the Kingdom. In Matthew's world miracles were seen in terms of good and evil. If a person was ill, the cause was to be found in sin and the presence of some evil spirit. Cures were sought through exorcisms, where the power of the spirit over the person was broken and the illness removed. In terms of the message of Matthew, it is important to note that Jesus claims for himself the power of expulsion from the Kingdom of those who fail to carry out the will of God.

There are two important teachings to be found in today's text. The first stresses the importance of listening to God. This is very different to presuming that we know the will of God. When Jesus says "the person who hears these words of mine" he is not talking about a once in a lifetime hearing, or an occasional listening. He is talking about a person who builds their life on listening to God on a regular (daily) basis. Who is a person of prayer, used to opening themselves up to God each day. God speaks in all kinds of ways, in every situation in which we find ourselves. The disciple is the one who tunes in to what it is he is saying. It is no use simply turning to God in times of crisis and hoping that a Divine message will be heard. Prayer is something that needs to be a habit for the disciple, in good times and in hard times, so that at all times they can walk in peace knowing they travel in the presence of God. The second point that Matthew makes is that the teachings of Jesus are more than just good ideas. For the power of the Kingdom to be experienced, those who believe need to set out and explore ways of putting the teachings of Jesus into action. They have to be more than good ideas and good intentions. Faith without action is no real faith at all.

***Prayer***

Loving Father, you reveal your will to us in the person and the teachings of your Son Jesus. Help us to hear him speaking to us in the events of our lives, and strengthen us to do his will.

**Monday November 1st**

*All Saints*

**Matthew 5:1-12a**

When Jesus sees the crowd, he sees before him people who must be challenged to enter into the Kingdom of his Father. It is not just the disciples who must be saved. The gifts of God are meant for everyone. By having Jesus go to the mountain to preach this message of life in the Kingdom, Matthew is clearly making links between Moses and Jesus and between the journey of the people of Israel to Canaan and that of the new people of God out of slavery into freedom in the Kingdom. We see Jesus begin his ministry with this teaching on the mountain top and he will end his ministry at his Ascension once more on the top of the mountain. This time he will be sending out his disciples to take this teaching and to proclaim it to peoples all over the world. As the old covenant was made on a mountain, so this new covenant will also revolve around the mountain: the mount of the Beatitudes, the mount of Calvary and the mount of the Ascension (commissioning). Jesus has the crowd sit down at his feet, a device used by Matthew to present Jesus as the new teacher in the line of Moses and that he has come to present to the people a message and teaching from God. The rest of the Gospel will explain in detail the message that he brings.

One of the important things about the teaching is the repetition of the word "bless". The best translation would go something like: "God blesses those who...". This is important because the whole idea of blessedness comes from an understanding that it is something that God will do to a person if they live in a particular way. Blessing is not something that can be earned or built up by human behaviour. It comes about because a person is united with God. These teachings are saying that if you live in this way, then you will find that you have left behind your old ways of sin and have united yourself to God. Because you are united with God you will find that there are certain blessings that will find their way into your life. The list of things that come about from union with God are really quite exciting: such people will live in the Kingdom and so find comfort when they need it, inherit the earth, be satisfied in all that they do, see God, become children of God (with all the protections, support and the rights of inheritance that go with it) and know what it is to be loved by God. But they have to live in the way set out by Jesus.

***Prayer***

Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ. Help us by your grace to live according to his teachings that we may know the blessings of your Kingdom.

**Tuesday November 2nd**

*All Souls*

**Mark 14:15-24**

We find Jesus and his disciples at their Passover meal, a gathering that included Judas. While Jesus seems to have known that he was about to be betrayed, there is no such evidence that the other disciples had any idea about what was going to take place. There is a certain inevitability about the whole story, because it is clear that if Jesus had made his thoughts known clearly to the disciples then they would have stopped Judas from the betrayal. But he did not. This is important in Mark's theology, for it means that Jesus could have avoided the confrontation. He chose not to. He went to his death fully aware of his options, and choosing obedience rather than his own comfort and life. This is a part of why the cross in Mark is a sign of the triumph of God and not of defeat. However, just because this is all going according to the plan of God it does not excuse the betrayal of Judas. He was still free to pursue a path of faithfulness and to repent of his sins. The question of the disciples "Is it I" is meant to be a question that is on the lips of all who seek to be disciples, for the betrayal of the Lord is not a one off event, but is an ongoing reality.

One of the themes that Mark weaves through his Gospel is the pure conviction that Jesus has of the love of his Father for him and the divine origins of his mission. These are the two beliefs that make it possible for Jesus to deal with the betrayal of one of his close companions, the abandonment of him by the rest, the handing over to the Jewish authorities, his suffering and his terrible death on the cross. It does not stop him from being afraid and it does not take the threats away. What it does is provide him with a firm foundation with which to tackle those huge challenges. He begins with a belief in the love of God for him and he knows that nothing can take that away. His senses may be fooled and it appears as if all is lost. To the unbeliever the cross and the tomb look like defeat. He sees that these will not stop God's love for him, whatever the views of the world around him. Nothing can stop the love of God. Not the hatred of others. Not the plotting and planning of misguided and selfish men. Not the malice and vindictiveness of the soldiers and priests. Neither death nor burial can stop the love of God flowing through to him. It is there that we have our inspiration and our hope, for as we pick up our own crosses and follow after him, we too can know Peace.

***Prayer***

Father, through the grace of your Holy Spirit, give us courage and hope in all things. Fill us with confidence in your presence so that in all life's struggles and hurdles, we can know peace.

**Wednesday December 1st**

**Matthew 15:29-37**

This is the second account of Jesus feeding the crowd. This activity takes place, not in a "lonely place" as earlier (14:13ff), but in the desert. For Matthew and his Jewish audience this is an important note because it would bring to mind the feeding of the people of Israel during their wanderings in the deserts around Mt Sinai, after their escape from Egypt. The role of the disciples also seems to be more pronounced in this account than in the earlier one. Jesus blessed the bread and gave it to the disciples and it was they who then distributed it to the hungry crowds. It also seems that Matthew has in mind the later Eucharist, with the crowds sitting down to eat and the bread being taken and broken before being distributed. He is possibly also drawing on the Hebrew tradition of anticipating the messianic banquet in heaven when God will sit down and eat with his chosen people. Through Jesus God is shown as dealing abundantly with the needs of his pilgrim people. They are hungry and in danger of collapsing along the way and in response to their situation he moves in and provides them with food to eat. This time there are not twelve baskets of scraps left over but seven. This is a number that means abundance or completeness. God's feeding of his people does not end there, but is an ongoing sign of his love.

The Exodus story seems to hover in the background throughout the Gospel of Matthew, just as it is an important part of the spiritual background for Judaism. For many of the prophets, the time of the Exodus was the only time that the Hebrews were truly God's people. This was because they needed him and depended on him. There was no way that they could survive in the desert without him. They could never have left their state of slavery in Egypt unless God set them free. They would have died from starvation or thirst in the desert unless he fed and watered them and they would have been slaughtered by the bands of warriors that created havoc in the wilderness unless God fought with them. It is this thought that is brought into the story of salvation by Jesus in this miracle. To be fed by God means that we need to first of all acknowledge that we are hungry for what God alone can provide. We can only know our need of God when we humble ourselves before him and admit to our fragility, weakness and inability to make sense of our lives.

***Prayer***

Merciful God, you heard the cries of your people Israel as they struggled as slaves in Egypt and you led them to freedom. Hear us as we call to you for help and feed us with your grace.

**Tuesday November 30th**

*St Andrew*

**Matthew 4:18-22**

In the time of Jesus there would have been many fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee, (there is a note in the writings of Josephus that says that on one occasion he managed to get together two hundred and forty fishing boats for an expedition), and it was a profitable form of business. Matthew implies that it was the arrest of John the Baptist that led Jesus to move to Galilee (4:12). John was removed by Herod, but then Jesus stepped in to continue that ministry in a new and higher way. We do not know much about the men called by Jesus but we can safely presume that this was not their first contact. From John 1:35 we suspect that some of the disciples of Jesus were already disciples of John the Baptist, suggesting that they were men searching for the Messiah or at least for renewal of life. Matthew writes the way he does to highlight the authority of Jesus. He speaks and people respond. In the case of the disciples it was a truly radical abandonment of all that was in their past. This is the nature of the Kingdom in Matthew's Gospel. The Kingdom has drawn near and things cannot continue on as they were. The apostles understand this for they left their nets "at once" and followed Jesus, not waiting to sort out their domestic situation or their livelihood.

The twofold aspect of discipleship is clearly laid out by Jesus. They were to be fishers of men. That was the vocation, but such a ministry was only possible if they were prepared to "come follow me". It is the following of Jesus that makes the fishing possible. When he says "follow" he does not just mean that they were to travel with him on his journey around Galilee. The following meant "imitating". They were to do as he did, live as he lived and be prepared to die as he was going to die. The success of the fishing would depend on their faithfulness to that calling. Throughout the Gospel we see the Apostles struggling with this with varying levels of success. This is the same situation for those who seek to be disciples today. Our own success in proclaiming the Gospel will depend on our own union with Christ. The more we reflect Jesus in our daily living the more the Gospel will be planted in the hearts and minds of those around us. Mission will always depend on spirituality. Jesus chose as apostles those who were uneducated and of low standing to make this point clear. Their greatness as Apostles came from his grace and life within them.

*Prayer*

Loving Lord, we know too well our weaknesses and failings and how we are too often unfaithful in our discipleship. Help us to repent and turn to you for the graces we need.

**Wednesday November 3rd**

**Luke 14:25-33**

For Jesus, entry into the Kingdom of God has conditions. It cannot happen by chance and accident. It stems from a choice freely made and a covenant faithfully lived out. It is a teaching directed to those seeking to be disciples and so is not meant as a judgement or assessment on the performance of the Pharisees (in Matthew the equivalent is found in the directions to the Twelve and is a part of their mission instructions). The demands are uncompromising: be willing to leave family ties, be prepared to face some self-denial and be ready to put aside material possessions. These are put down as serious considerations to be examined, understood and accepted prior to the life of discipleship. They are conditions of discipleship and as such are not up for negotiation or compromise. This is why martyrdom was seen as being at the pinnacle of discipleship, for such people did place their love of Jesus and faith in his promises before all else. It is in this context that we need to understand the metaphor of picking up the cross and following after Jesus. Everyone has a cross that is personal and to be found in their individual lives. This needs to be picked up in the manner of Jesus and then, and only then, can the disciple follow after Jesus. Is the point the picking up of the cross, or the following?

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus did not carry his cross to Golgotha. Simon did it for him. The point for Luke is not that this "cross" is the wooden object on which he was crucified. That cross has come to symbolize the whole of the humble and obedient service of the Son for his Father. The cross of Jesus was his ministry, his mission and his response to God. Discipleship begins with an understanding that we have a role, a mission and a ministry to carry out for God in the world. That is our cross and we are called to carry it in the same way that Jesus carried his — in obedient and humble service of God. Once we acknowledge that, we then need to follow after Jesus and that is where the real challenge is to be found. It is easy to pick it up, and then when the demands become too great, to put it down again. Following is tough and that is where the cross can be seen as the yoke of Christ about which Matthew speaks (Matt 11:29). It is the cross of Christ, taken up in faith, that makes it possible for us to then journey forward in hope and in peace, for we know that the Father, having given us our crosses will not allow us to fall under the weight.

*Prayer*

Merciful God, we thank you for our callings to discipleship and for the promise of the graces and gifts we need to live lives of service. Help us to walk faithfully in the steps of Jesus.

## **Thursday November 4th**

## **Luke 15:1-10**

Jesus now turns from addressing the crowds to once again pointing out to the Pharisees and Scribes their failings. They are unhappy because he continues to meet with sinners and to eat with them. The next three parables have been described as being “the heart of the Third Gospel” for they bring out clearly Luke’s themes of the mercy and love that God shows to sinners and announces the call of Jesus for people to repent and to turn from their sins. In this whole section of the Gospel Luke goes on to show the special love that God has for those who are on the margins of the society, those who stand condemned in the eyes of the world, and the sinners. We see this in the parables of chapter 15 but elsewhere as well. Those who are “lost” are the tax collectors and sinners of verse 1. The shepherd brings out two important points. The first is his willingness to search out the lost sheep. The second is the great joy that he shows when the sheep is found. This is how God works through the ministry of Jesus, in reaching out to the lost sinner and calling him to repent. “The Son of Man came to seek out and to save those who were lost” (19:10). It is an extraordinary picture, that of heaven rejoicing when a single lost sinner repents and returns to a life of faithfulness.

This parable, as with the other parables of chapter 15, stresses the love and compassion of the shepherd. You would think that with one hundred sheep (the number simply represents a large quantity) the shepherd would either not know that he had lost one, or would be tempted to leave it out there and hope to pick it up later. Like the poem [The Hound Of Heaven](#), God pursues the sinner. The rejoicing upon finding the lost soul is an indication of how Luke understands the love of God for his people. This is furthered by the idea of “gladly” lifting the sheep onto the shoulders of the shepherd (not found in Matthew’s version [Matt 18:12ff]). This leads to great joy in heaven and a celebratory feast with friends and neighbours. The details, if we try to tie them to a real situation, all have some problems, but it is the overall picture that Luke is trying to give to us. God loves us so much that he cannot bear the thought of us going astray, getting lost and threatened with death. Our sins do not stop that love. As the parable makes clear, it is because of our sins that God sent his Son that we might be found, and once again know his divine shelter.

### ***Prayer***

Loving Father, you shepherded your people Israel and led them to the Promised Land and gave us your Son as our own Good Shepherd. Help us to allow him to shepherd us his way.

5

## **Monday November 29th**

## **Matthew 8:5-13**

The Centurion in this story was probably an officer under the authority of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and son of Herod the Great. He is an unusually humane officer, showing compassion and concern for a servant who is paralysed. In the Roman Empire slaves did not matter, their status was sub-human. It was of no importance whether they suffered or were in pain. As Aristotle once wrote, a slave is a “living tool” and no better or worse than an inanimate tool. He addresses Jesus as “Lord” which implies that Jesus has the power to help him. The Greek of the reply of Jesus could be read in this way: “How shall I, a Jew, come and heal him in the home of a Gentile?”. There are no examples in the Gospels of Jesus entering the house of a non-Jew, but here he is clearly willing to do so. The Centurion understands the problems this would create and asks that Jesus cure by his word without having to come to his home. If he can exercise his authority as a military commander and have people respond to his word of command, so Jesus too should be able to command the sickness to go and it would obey him. This is the level of faith to which Jesus responds and which produces the healing of the servant.

One part of the shock of this story is the promise that is given to the Gentiles. The traditional Jewish teaching was that “the dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean”, yet here is the Son of Man willing to risk being exposed to the danger of breaking the teachings of the Scribes. More than that, Jesus makes the prediction that there will be many Gentiles coming from the four corners of the earth to sit at the table in heaven with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Jews looked forward to this feast in heaven but would never contemplate the possibility of there being Gentiles there as well. Entrance into God’s Kingdom was no longer via membership of a single nation. It was not enough to simply be a Jew. The passport to the Kingdom was faith. Salvation was open to all who came to God in their need and who were prepared to live in faith doing as God demanded. They are the credentials of the disciple — lives of faith. This means that Christian life is assessed, not just by baptism, but by how a person then goes about putting into practice the demands of the Gospel. Baptism is a once in a lifetime event, but the invitation to faith is something that requires a daily response in all the events in our lives.

### ***Prayer***

Loving Father, when we are in doubt and uncertain about events in our lives, help us to turn to you in faith as did the Centurion to Jesus, knowing that you have the power to heal.

30

**Sunday November 28th** *Advent Sunday* **Matthew 24:37-44**

*Fr Robert Newton*

We can always count on apocalyptic language this first Sunday of Advent. Echoing the language of Revelation, the bizarre visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, on this New Year's Day of the Christian year, the gospel writers always greet us with images of cosmic catastrophe and jolting judgement – stories that warn us that all that is predictable and all that is comfortable in our lives will be swept away. And, they tell us, there is nothing we can do to stop it. Matthew's predictions were written to a complacent and lethargic community – Christians who had lost the expectation of the Second Coming – lost the vision of God's rich and peaceable Kingdom on earth. After all, the Church in Jerusalem had been waiting for eighty years and nothing had happened. And so their faith and their commitment and their connection to God had cooled off. The believers in Jerusalem had become lukewarm. They had become so concerned over matters of how the Church was to be ordered and the attendant politics that ensued that they had forgotten the vision of the Kingdom. They were ablaze with contention and dispute, but dim on the message of Christ. The early Church was in dire need of a wake up call.

Each one of us lives in the shadow of the apocalypse – the dark reality of the end of our time and the end of the world's time. That is the warning of Advent. But there is also good news. There is also the promise of Advent – the promise that in the darkness, in the shadows, in the unpredictable anxiety of our unfinished lives, God is present. God is in control, and God will come again. With each candle we light, the shadows recede a bit, and the promise comes closer. With each candle we light, we are proclaiming that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome it. The promise is that wherever there is darkness and dread in our lives, wherever there is darkness and dread in the world around us, God is in charge, and hope is alive. And as long and as interminable as the night seems, morning will come – in God's good time and God's good way. And so we have a choice. We can wither away with anxiety. Or we can wait expectantly. We can bury our fears in the deep valleys of sleep. Or we can wake up and watch the horizon. We can crawl into caves of dread and despair. Or we can find our way into the hallowed halls of hope. We can give up and settle for little. Or we can work diligently for the salvation of the world – trusting that God will complete our work with wholeness and abundance.

**Prayer**

29

Heavenly Father, on this New Year's Day of the Christian year let us never forget that you offer us the light of salvation.

**Friday November 5th**

**Luke 16:1-8**

In this new chapter we see Luke leading us on the travel story to reflect on the appropriate use of material goods by the disciple. The opening parable is not easy to interpret and it will be easier if we do the exegesis and the application in one block. The first problem is to work out why the manager was called "dishonest". It does not say that he stole anything, just that he "squandered". He seems to have had no explanation for what he was doing and makes no attempt to provide one. Next we should note that this manager was probably the manager of a property of an absentee landlord, of which there were many in Palestine. These were trusted men who were well trained and competent and had the power to act in the name of the landlord. He would have had the right to lend out the property of the owner and to gain an income from the interest earned, but this was a practice that was open to abuse with the man on the spot not necessarily making clear just how much of a commission he was taking and how much was his own and how much should go to the owner. What is really puzzling is why the owner would praise the manager! He would not have known just how much of a commission the manager was making on the loans, but he would have known that some kind of self-serving exchanges were taking place. What the man is praised for is the cancelling of his own commission. He was not writing off the debt of the landowner (there is a technical term for such actions and they are not used here). What he has lost is his own commission. From these notes we can then see that what Luke is trying to show is how disciples should use their material possessions. His goods' commissions were used in a way that would guarantee a secure future. It is not his dishonesty that is being praised but his prudence. In the face of the disaster that was going to destroy his livelihood he acted in a manner which would enable him to survive. The Christian disciple is faced with a crisis brought on by the coming of the Kingdom of God. They need to make sure that they use their material possessions in an equally prudent manner so that they are able to respond fully to the demands of the Kingdom. It is so easy for what we have in the way of possessions, commitments, passions and the million and one things that take up our time and energy to distract us from life in the Kingdom. The prudent thing would be to manage them in such a way that we are still able to be faithful and to enjoy the blessings that are on offer from God. That would be both wise and prudent.

**Prayer**

6

Father, as our lives fill up with all kinds of things that distract us from service of the Gospel, so fill us with your graces and light that we may resist their temptations and remain faithful.

**Saturday November 6th**

**Luke 16:9-15**

What follows on here are three additions to the parable of the dishonest manager which provide us with a variety of different interpretations. What these show us is how the early Church used the parable for its own moral teaching. The first, verses 8b-9, shows the children of this world to be the same as the manager. They are prudent in dealing with this world and so have something to teach the children of the light. Christian disciples need to exercise prudence in dealing with material possessions. The second, verses 10-12, speaks of responsibility and faithfulness on the part of the disciple. Faithfulness is something demanded whether the person is dealing with the major areas of life or in the little things that seem unimportant. The third addition, verse 13, does not really relate back to the parable but reflects a broad Christian attitude towards wealth. The question that it asks is: "What is going to control your life? God or mammon?". No one can serve both. One has to take the prominent position. This is not necessarily a once and for all decision, but one that will need to be made time and time again. Anyone who allows themselves to be caught up in the pursuit of money (and worldly possessions and position) becomes a slave of money (and worldly possessions and position).

It is fascinating to see how the early Christian community took the original parable of Jesus and applied it to their own times and conditions. It is clear from these additions that part of the problem for the community Luke was serving was that it was caught up in many different things and many demands were being made on their time, resources and energy. As a result the demands of the Gospel were being put into second place. After all, people have to survive don't they? Luke, through the way he has put these stories together is forcing the believers to assess their own lives and to work out just what it is that "controls" them. Whom do we serve? How do we work out our order of priorities and where does God truly come into the equation? More and more parish communities are finding out that there are enormous demands being made on people's time and resources and more often than not it is God who misses out. This is why the parable is so timely. The things of the world are not evil and there is nothing wrong with money and possessions. However, we are warned that they can quickly become gods who constantly demand more of us.

***Prayer***

Almighty God, you have given us many gifts with which our lives are truly blessed. Help us to use them wisely, understand that they are gifts from you and share them with others.

**Saturday November 27th**

**Luke 21:34-36**

This short text brings to an end the teachings of Jesus on the end of the world and he ends appropriately with an encouragement to be vigilant and waiting in prayer. It is intended to be a guide to the disciples as they prepare for the coming of the day of the Son of Man. It is unique to Luke though there are some similarities to the themes of Mark 13:33-37 and possibly Matthew 25:13, 31-46. Jesus teaches that those who want to be his followers and who are attuned to his teachings must not allow the way they live to become burdened or distracted by drunkenness, by a giving in to sensual living or the pursuit of material possessions. That is not the way to prepare for the end. No one knows when that day will come but they do know that it will suddenly appear and there will not be an opportunity to make preparations. People will be caught up in those days like an animal in the hunter's snare. If they wish to survive the ordeal they need to be people of prayer who live such a life that they will not be found wanting when they stand for judgement before the Son of Man.

One of the emphases that we find in Luke is his concentration on the "today" element of Christian discipleship. He has had to deal with the reality of the puzzlement of the early Christians that had arisen over the delay to the return of Jesus. The first generation Church lived in expectation of this early return and an end to the world and much of Paul is peppered with what this means for Christian living. Luke, however, shows a desire to shift the emphasis to what the sayings of Jesus meant for guiding the way of life of his own generation. This is evident from the use he makes of the word "today" (4:21; 5:26; 19:5, 9; 23:43) and words like "daily" (9:23; 11:3; 16:19; 19:47). This is an important focus, for Luke understands Jesus to be an inspiration, guide and source of grace for the Christian as he or she lives out their lives in a Church under stress. The Gospel becomes a guideline for daily living. Being a disciple and living according to the teachings of Jesus helps us to live out each and every day and to come to an appreciation of the meaning of each and every event in our lives. It is a way of life, a way of being authentically human. The end of the world is a reality as is the return of Jesus in glory, but we need meditate on it only as an aid to how we live today and for today. The Gospel prepares us not only for eternal life but also for living in the world.

***Prayer***

Lord God our heavenly Father, the whole of creation rests in your hands and it is for you to determine the time of its ending. Help us, through the grace and power of your Holy Spirit to live each moment as if it were our last.

## **Friday November 26th**

## **Luke 21:29-33**

This parable is put here in Luke's Gospel as a kind of commentary on the teachings of Jesus about the end. The parable is found in Mark 13:28ff. The image is clear. When the people see a fig tree covered in leaves and blossoms, they know that it will soon be time to harvest the fruit. So too when people see "these things" happening, they will know that the end has come. He then goes further. The end is "imminent", making this message relevant for those of "this generation". The teaching is a major one for the early communities. They believed that the Son of Man would be coming at any time and they lived in expectation of that return. Most of the teachings of Paul and those found in the other epistles need to be read with the understanding that the world was about to end. Discipleship was then a way of life for a short period of time. The people of "this generation" would live to see the end, that is how close it was! He ends with the saying about the sky and the earth passing away before his words pass away, to highlight the importance of what he is saying. It is not something that can be taken lightly and the disciples need to keep that in mind when planning their lives. The people believed that God, as creator of the world, could and would, bring it to an end in his own time.

The end is nigh! We all know those funny cartoons and sketches that depict a man walking around with a sandwich board predicting the end of the world. And we laugh. No one seriously thinks about the end. It is something that is too far off in the future. With our modern sensibilities we move that kind of teaching to the fringes of our Christian faith. If he has not returned after two thousand years, he is unlikely to return later on today or come back tomorrow. But of course there is no biblical support for that view. And anyway, it is embarrassing! The whole point for Luke is that his community should be living in expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. Whether or not he returns tomorrow has nothing to do with the message. It is as valid now as it was on the lips of Jesus. We are called to be living as if the end were tomorrow. That is the key point. If Jesus were to return this evening after dinner, how confident would we be of our judgement? That is the message. This passage should act as a call to repentance and renewal. It demands that we go out and live in such a way that the Gospel is evident in all that we think, do and say.

**Prayer** Heavenly Father, we know that the time will one day come when our lives will come to an end and we will stand for judgement before your throne. Help us to live today as if we were coming before you tomorrow.

## **Sunday November 7th**

## **Luke 20:27-38**

*Fr Robert Newton*

The resurrection theme is at the heart of our reading today. The whole concept of the resurrection per se is under attack from those who had no truck with the idea, namely the Sadducees. Jesus had already tackled the question of the legitimacy of giving taxes to Caesar, set up by the Pharisees and the Herodian party, and now it is the Sadducees turn to try once more to trip him up. They quoted a law, though little used, that was still on the books. This Levirate Law, as it was called, sought to ensure that a man had an heir and the race was preserved. By their mocking preservation of the woman with seven husbands the Sadducees were rubbishing the whole concept of a resurrection – a concept which was to be at the heart of Christian belief. But Christ turns the tables on them. Where there is no more death he says, marriage to safeguard legal succession or to safeguard the tribe will not be needed. Having satisfied the rabbinical legal mind and thwarted the Sadducees in their argument, which was so clearly meant to entrap him, Jesus argues that a belief in a life after death was not something new. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the living, so why name these men, if they were not in some way living?

As children of God in an exchange of love we have a relationship not ended by death. As St John says, we live now in him and he in us. If we are children of God we have to be children of the resurrection. So how can we absorb this vital and fundamental resurrection theme into our own lives? If we really believe that God cares about us and that we have a future in and with him, we need not and should not be thrown off balance by a clever remark or a mocking comment that seeks to undermine our faith and trust. A title conferred on Christians from the earliest times was that we are an "Easter People". How does the realisation of this title affect our everyday lives? Do we need to stop occasionally and measure what we are doing, against the hope and endless possibilities of a belief in the resurrection? Do we need to ask ourselves is there one way this next week the practice of our faith could be made more alive? – a prayer, a meditation or reflection, a reading, an action? Do we come across in our communities as an Easter People? What do we need to do individually and collectively as the Church to live out the resurrection as a witness in our world?

**Prayer** Heavenly Father, in the sure knowledge that you have made us for yourself, help us to use the gifts you have given us so that we may come closer to you.

## Monday November 8th

## Luke 17:1-6

Jesus once again turns and addresses his teaching to the disciples, this time about the inevitability of sin existing within the community of faith. It is not sin that is warned against, but the fact that some believers will act in such a way that others will sin because of their actions. He probably has in mind the sin of apostasy, where some members of the community put forward ideas and beliefs that cause others to go astray. The "little ones" are the followers of Jesus who are helpless and open to exploitation. When a person does sin, the disciple is to forgive his brother or sister their wrongdoings. The theme of forgiveness is strong in Luke but until now he has spoken about forgiveness as a quality of God. Now he is making it an aspect of discipleship. The whole point of giving a rebuke is so that the person acknowledges that they have sinned and they turn and seek forgiveness. Rebukes that are aimed at punishing are not a part of what Jesus has in mind here. They are to be prepared to forgive "seven times a day" if that is what is needed. Here the number seven is meant to bring out the idea of totality. There is not meant to be a limit on it, just as there is no limit on the forgiveness on offer from Jesus.

The disciples ask for an increase in their faith so that they are able to live out the kind of lives that Jesus is demanding of them. But they are told that faith is not a matter of quantity. What they need is the right kind of faith, a genuine faith. True faith has great powers and is able to transform and change people and events. A true faith is not a matter of ideas but is something that is used to transform a person's life. The contrast is there in the image of the mustard seed size faith being able to throw a huge mulberry tree into the sea. Clearly Jesus sees that the disciples do not have the right kind of faith but reassures them that it can and will grow. That is the nature of faith. It grows by listening to the Word of God, by putting into practice the teachings of Jesus, by sharing our lives of faith within the Christian community and through the Sacraments. We never reach the stage where we have "enough" faith and so do not need to keep growing. Our faith is always enough for the moment in which we live but is calling us ever onward to new levels so that we are ready for whatever comes tomorrow. Our lives are filled with all kinds of "mulberry trees" which block out the sun and soak up the goodness from our lives. Faith in God enables us to uproot them!

### *Prayer*

Lord God, strengthen our faith through the grace of your Holy Spirit that we may move forward filled with hope and confidence knowing that with you all things are possible.

## Thursday November 25th

## Luke 21:20-28

In this section of his teachings, Jesus focusses his words on the city of Jerusalem itself and his picture is not all that encouraging. He is talking about the "end". The city will be surrounded by camps of enemies and there will be no escaping for anyone who stays in the city. In verse 22 he quotes Hosea 9:7 when he speaks of it being a "time of vengeance" and it helps us understand how he sees the coming events. For Hosea, the end of the city was a result of their sins and a judgement on their actions. They have brought the destruction on themselves. The city will be destroyed and its inhabitants put to the sword. Those who survive the killings will be taken off to be slaves and the city and nation will be put under the rule of foreigners. The reference to the misery of the nursing mothers highlights the depth of the horror. It is likely that in writing up this section of the Gospel, Luke has before him clear images of the end of the city and the historical events have shaped what he has written. The writings of Josephus on the fall of Jerusalem paint a picture that point to the accuracy of what Luke has said. Through it all Luke has in mind his own theology of the saving works of God. The end of the city can only be understood as being a part of that divine activity. The actual purposes may not be clear, but for Luke it is important that his community sees it in this way. Remember that when we talk about Jerusalem and the Temple, we are talking about the signs of God's love for his people.

If we read through this section as a complete section, we come to verse 27 and are jolted by the message of hope. The city is falling, there is death, pain, suffering and fear. The physical world around them is also in "distress" and what are the faithful doing: they look up and see the Son of Man coming to them on a cloud. This is a clear allusion to Daniel 7:13 and the message here is the same as it was in Daniel. Faith provides hope **in the midst** of anxiety, suffering and fear. When the Son of Man comes, he does not put the sun, moon and stars back into the sky. He does not chase away the Romans, and bring the people back into the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. He comes to them in their perilous situation and it is Jesus "amidst the suffering" who offers hope. He is never a distant God who locks himself away in heaven and watches on without love or compassion. He is a God who rolls up his sleeves and engages with his people, giving them hope when all else fails.

### *Prayer*

Almighty and merciful Lord, come to us in the midst of all those things that fill us with despair, worry and pain, that we may know that in all things you are God without end.

**Wednesday November 24th**

**Luke 21:12-19**

Jesus now goes on to offer some warning to the disciples about the price that they will have to pay if they remain faithful to the Gospel. It will be "because of my name" that the disciples will face all kinds of persecutions. The assaults will come from both Jewish and Gentile sources and they will force believers to give witness to their faith. It will force them to be open and honest about what they believe. He makes it clear that those who believe will have to make some sacrifices. But they should not be afraid because he (Jesus) would help them in their defence (Mark says that it will be the Spirit who will provide the words they need [Mk 13:11]). It is this that will help them come through the trials victoriously and this guarantee would make it possible for them to continue in their faith unafraid of what might happen. He also warns them that the persecutions will also come from among their own family members and from their friends. The hardships will include, for some, death. It seems odd that he says on the one hand that some will be put to death and then on the other that "not a hair on your head will be lost". What he has in mind here is the continuance of what it is they have been proclaiming by their witness. The seeds of faith will not perish even if their bodies are destroyed.

This is a beautiful picture painted by Jesus. It is not so much simply a warning about the end and of all the sufferings that will come as that time approaches. What we need to keep our eyes on is the guarantee that the death of the individual believers does not mean the end of the Kingdom. Lives of faith plant seeds that will bear fruit in the time to come. The disciple may not see the fruits of their life of faith but they are there. It is Jesus who will make such sacrifice fruitful. What they are called upon to be doing is to persevere. When things become difficult and it seems that the demands are too great and the returns too small, it is easy to lose heart and give up. Remember that what Jesus has in mind here is his coming death and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem. When the disciples see all that, it is understandable that they begin to panic because it seems that things are out of control. What they need to keep in mind is that whatever the darkness of the present, their lives of faith are planting the seeds of hope for the future. God will bring life out of death and hope out of disaster. It is a matter of keeping our eyes on God.

***Prayer***

Merciful Father, the world in which we live is filled with so much hatred and evil that it is difficult at times to see your hand at work. Fill us with hope in our doubts, and faith when in fear.

**Tuesday November 9th**

**Luke 17:7-10**

We now have a group of four sayings which end one section of this travel story of Luke. It is a powerful message because he makes it clear that all Christian service is inadequate and that in the final analysis they are unprofitable servants. It does not matter how well they might have performed their work, they are still servants lacking in performance. He also makes it clear that the service a disciple gives to the Gospel does not guarantee salvation. Ministry and the fulfilling of baptismal promises is not the process whereby one earns a place in the Kingdom. It is demanded of those who wish to live in the Kingdom of God, but salvation remains a gift. It is something that God showers on those to whom he pleases to offer it. What is also apparent is that there is no room for human boasting. It is not possible to sit back and say "Look what I have already done!". There is always a need for more to be done and there is never a point when enough has been given. The word "unprofitable" in verse 10 means a servant who recognizes that what he has managed to do in God's service is still inadequate. In the pagan literature of the time it was a word often associated with troublesome slaves.

The parable speaks of the servant as being "unprofitable" and the presupposition is that the Christian has done all that he was supposed to do. But that should not be considered to be of special merit for that is what is expected. Further, if a Christian performs deeds that are above and beyond what is demanded, then that too is not worthy of special consideration and notice, for we can never do "enough". No matter how much we do, it is not enough. How easy it is to look at what we "do for God" and sit back and be pleased with ourselves. Recently I was told by a man that he had been faithful in the Church all his life and now he was going to sit back and leave the work to others. What he does may change with time and age, but there is still plenty to be doing for the Kingdom. The other danger is that it is so easy to get ourselves into the position where we can begin to feel that we are owed something by God. We go to Church on Sunday, are active in various things in the parish and give to the collection, therefore God owes us a sign of his appreciation. Then, when things go wrong, we can so easily begin to blame God and ask where the justice is. God owes us nothing. We owe God everything.

***Prayer***

Merciful Lord, we acknowledge your goodness to us and all the wonderful gifts with which you have blessed our lives. In all things, make us truly grateful and eager to faithfully serve.

**Wednesday November 10th**

**Luke 17:11-19**

We now enter a new section of Luke’s travel account as we can see from the opening line where we are told that Jesus is making his way towards Jerusalem. This section runs to the end of 18:14 and is theologically showing us Jesus on his way to the city where God will be fulfilling his promises and bringing salvation to all nations. This story is found only in Luke and shows Jesus using his mighty power to benefit people who are under the control of an evil power and as a result are cut off from the wider community. He frees them from their illness and makes it possible for them to return to normal life among their families and friends. As the story unfolds we can see a number of contrasts being presented to us. The gratitude and the ingratitude, the Samaritan with the Jews and the faith that came out of the miracle for the one man and the lack of faith by the nine Jews. Some have called this story the “Thankful Samaritan” because the main point is not the miracle of healing but the faith that it created in the Samaritan. When he realizes that he has been healed he turns back to Jesus (repents) and falls down on his knees and gives thanks. For Luke that is the result of his eyes being opened. He knows what has happened to him and it is for that insight that he gives thanks. The healing then is incidental. What makes it even more compelling is that it is the Samaritan (an outcast and heretic for the Jews) who has his eyes opened while the Jews go on unmindful of the true miracle offered to them and so are shown as missing out on the gift of salvation.

It is hard for us to imagine what that group represented in the society. They were the worst of the worst and lived on the fringes of the towns and cities depending on scraps and charity to survive. When they come to Jesus they pray for a cure, but it does not happen immediately. As they went along the road the leprosy was cured. It was in their faith response to the command of Jesus that they found healing. But how hard would that have been to begin walking to see the priests, with the leprosy still scarring their skin? It would have been easier if their disease was taken away, and with a clean skin they went off to see the priests to be pronounced clean. That is the true test of faith, to believe and to act on those beliefs, to trust Jesus to the point where we can get on with our lives believing that the future rests in God’s capable and loving hands. Our seeing should not always depend on seeing the results we seek.

*Prayer* Father, our lives are so blessed by your generous love yet we so often fail in our duty of thankfulness, taking you and your gifts for granted. Help us show our thanks by living faithful lives.

**Tuesday November 23rd**

**Luke 21:5-11**

Clearly Jesus is continuing on his Temple teaching and here we see some of his teachings about the end of the world (this is called eschatology, or the study of the Last Things). The verses 5-11 serve as an introduction to this important section of the Gospel and arise out of some comments by the disciples on the beauty of the Temple. In his reply Jesus is offering a prophecy of the end of that building. Luke has clearly taken up the teachings of Jesus and has put it together here in the light of the events of August/September 70AD when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans. One of the key ideas in all Apocalyptic writings is that God is in control. (These are called apocalyptic because they are usually visions given by God to one of his prophets or chosen people, about what is going to happen in the future and at the end of time. An apocalypse is a revelation of God.) Here we see Jesus encouraging his followers not to be afraid when they see violence and political upheavals taking place, as it is simply part of a process that must take place. There will be many false prophets and doomsayers around who will stir up all kinds of confusion, fear and doubt. But Jesus’ followers are not to panic and not to fear for tomorrow.

Jesus is consistent in his teaching. He calls for faith and hope in God and in the power and desire of God to save those who seek to follow him. He notes that at the end there will be all kinds of disasters. There will be a breakdown of law and order, wars, famines, natural disasters and a general spread of violence and hatred. What the believers need to keep in mind is that God is the Almighty ruler of creation. Jesus overcame the power of Satan and in his dying and rising from the dead put all things under his feet. He never makes a promise that there will be no pain and suffering, no fear and anxiety. What he does say is that in all these things, God is still God. God is the ruler of all things, including history. He will not move in and shape it to suit the desires and likes of his children. What he will do is strengthen and grace the lives of all disciples, so that they are not destroyed by what unfolds around them. Even as the skies go dark and fall, God is King. If believers build their lives around the Gospel and use Gospel teachings to shape all that they do, then they will never be filled with despair and live without hope. They may not understand all that happens, but amidst it all, they will know Peace.

*Prayer* Loving Father, strengthen us in our lives in the world, that we may view what happens with the eyes of faith and know that in all things and through all things, you remain Lord of all.

## Monday November 22nd

## Luke 21:1-4

Having cleansed the Temple, we now find Jesus the King preaching and teaching in its precincts. It is hard to work out the exact meaning of the Widow's Mite, but there are five traditional understandings: (1) The true value of a gift is not the amount given but the amount left behind (that is, how much it truly costs the giver). (2) What is important is the spirit of the gift and the giving...self-offering, self-forgetfulness, detachment, etc. (3) The true gift is to give everything that one has. (4) Pious gifts and offerings should reflect the true state of one's possessions. (5) This is a story about the thoughts of Jesus on giving. All of these are helpful but do not really have strong textual support. Jesus condemned the religious laws and customs which took precedence over human needs. He attacked the Scribes for heaping up laws on the poor and needy who ended up in dire circumstances trying to fulfil the requirements of these laws (see Mark on Corban in Mk 7:10-13 and also his teaching about curing the sick on the Sabbath Day). It is this kind of background that makes us think that perhaps this is not about Jesus praising the widow? She has given "all that she had to live on" which puts her survival at risk. How will she now feed herself? Why is she doing this? It could be that the Scribes and the Pharisees have encouraged this kind of thing to the point where she would feel guilty if she did not make her offering, even if it meant that she starved. In the prior section he was attacking the Jewish leaders for devouring the estates of widows for dubious religious reasons. With this in mind, perhaps we can read this with a sense of sorrow in the comments of Jesus. It is with sadness that he notes how much she gave.

Whatever the interpretive difficulties of the passage, what is clear is that this woman understood her giving to require a sacrifice. She was not about to throw in some loose change. That small amount of money would have hurt her and left her short of funds for her daily living. Yet she made her offering to God because she seems to have understood it as a part of her spiritual life. That is the model for Christian giving and makes us stop and reflect on just how we would evaluate our own giving of time, resources and wealth? To give as the widow gives is to have a deep and passionate faith in God and a commitment to the spread of the Good News of the Kingdom. How would we stand before God?

### *Prayer*

Father, your love for us knows no limits, even to the sending of your Son that we may have life. Help us to show our gratitude and thanksgiving by living lives of generous sacrifice for you.

## Thursday November 11th

## Luke 17:20-25

This passage is again Lucan, with no counterpart being found in the other Gospels, though it is found in the Gospel of Thomas which is not a part of our New Testament collection. So far in Luke's Gospel we have heard of the Kingdom of God in the "Our Father" (11:2), as something that could be seen (9:27), as something that has "drawn near" (10:9, 11) and as a gift that has already overtaken his followers (11:20). These all help to provide the background for the questioning of the Pharisees. They were concerned about when the Kingdom would come and in his reply he tells them that they have misunderstood the nature of God's Kingdom. It cannot be understood by observable signs. They should not be looking for signs and places, for the Kingdom is "among you". Just what that means is a little unclear. It could mean that the Kingdom is in Jesus, "in your midst" in his preaching, teaching and miracle working. Or it could mean that the Kingdom is within their grasp. It is not hidden, but for those with eyes of faith and a desire to search for the truth, it can be found.

This reading always makes me sit back and wonder just what it was that the Pharisees were seeking? The Greek word "sign" suggests a quite flamboyant expression of the power and strength of God. It would have to be quite spectacular though, because so far when Jesus performed his miracles, the Pharisees said that his power came from his links with Satan! But that is what they wanted, something so overwhelming that they would be left with no alternative but faith. Jesus has already promised them only the sign of Jonah which was the great miracle of the conversions of the Babylonians. There is the sign we are given. Sins can be forgiven. People can be healed of their hatred, their bitterness, their anger and their sins. They can begin again. They can repent and turn away from an old way of life, becoming new once more. That is the miracle of salvation that is a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God. How easy it is to have our faith depending on God doing something for us (or something bad not happening to us). Yet before our eyes we have the greatest of all miracles: God loves us, even though we are sinners! Others may turn their back and withdraw their friendship. But not God.

### *Prayer*

Loving and generous God and Father of us all, we thank you for inviting us to share in a life of faith and for showering us with your blessings, even though we so often sin and prove ourselves to be unworthy. Be for us a light of hope so that in all that happens we remain comforted by your presence.

**Friday November 12th**

**Luke 17:26-37**

We now see Luke talking about the Son of Man and not the Kingdom of God. He compares the days of the Son of Man to the days of Noah and the days of Lot to introduce the theme of vigilance to the teaching. The people are warned about the dangers of indifference and of treating matters relating to the last day in a light-hearted way. Because the people of the time of Noah were not worried about the rain, and treated the threat of a flood with indifference, did not stop them from being washed away and drowned. The people of Sodom were too busy with other things to be concerned about the possibility of judgement, and as they partied on the fire came down from heaven and destroyed them all. So it will be with the coming of the Son of Man. People will treat it with an indifference that will lead to their destruction and death. When the end comes it will come suddenly, and there will be no time to go into the house and retrieve one's valuables. On that day it will not matter what people try to do to influence the outcome. Any human attempts to find salvation will be in vain. It will all be at the discretion of God. In the background for Luke is the delay in the return of Jesus. The early Church communities expected him to return "imminently" and this expectation coloured much of their church life. Luke, in the way he writes up this story, is trying to keep his community vigilant in the face of the delay.

The difficult message is found in verse 33. "Whoever tries to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will gain it." What this seems to be suggesting is that there is nothing that we can do which will help us to gain salvation or cause us to lose eternal life. Either way, it is a gift from God. This is a big turn around from the theology most of us were brought up on where we were told that sin can damn us. In this story Jesus places salvation back into the hands of his Father. It is at the discretion of God. He is the judge and he will do it on his terms. What we are called to do is to live lives of faithfulness, not because we fear the fires of hell, but because that is the thing we need to do to be fully human, fully alive and faithful to our baptismal callings. It makes our judgement of the lives of others a risky and precarious business. We might see the sins they do and wonder how God could give them eternal life. But he judges with different eyes and with merciful and loving intent. That is a source of peace for all of us.

*Prayer*

Merciful God, your ways are beyond our knowing and our understanding, but we trust in your generous love. In all that happens, help us to confidently leave our lives in your hands.

**Sunday November 21st**

*Christ the King*

**Luke 23:35-43**

*Fr Robert Newton*

We are told in our reading today that the soldiers mocked Jesus. "He saved others", they said, "can't he save himself?", as if to say, if he were a real king he would have used his power to prevent himself from dying such a futile and painful death. But instead we are given an example of a king who uses his power in a very different way. We see Jesus as the King who becomes the servant washing the feet of his disciples the day before he is captured and tried before the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem and tortured by the Roman authorities. We see the King and Judge of all creation being judged and condemned by his own creatures, and finally we see him being tortured and killed while the people around him mock him for his weakness. In some mysterious way, Jesus chose the path of vulnerability of self-emptying instead of the way of power, determination and domination. When we celebrate the feast of Christ the King we are celebrating the weakness of God. In his courage and weakness Jesus shows us another way. The Church throughout the world and throughout history is full of examples of Christians who became martyrs and saints by following Christ's example, becoming weak and defenceless in the face of violence and oppression. Destruction and death appear to win but never have the last word. In the end we know that Christ the suffering servant has won the battle over sin and death.

Many situations often seem hopeless, beyond any chance of redemption or resolution. Sometimes people are faced with appalling living conditions and living in fear or terror. Or others may be faced with disease and suffering that they think they cannot bear. Others are struggling with difficult situations or relationships, still others are grieving and bereaved. Life is not easy for many people. At some time or another we will all have our crosses to bear. There are no easy or pat answers, and sometimes a situation may seem utterly futile. But even when we are broken by suffering and failure we are not alone. God has gone before us and in his love chose to save the world through his weakness and suffering. In the end we know Christ has triumphed and we are called to follow him in redeeming and transforming the world. In this way all our weakness and pain can be taken up and transformed into the redeeming act of Christ on the cross.

*Prayer*

God our Father, you sent your Son and he suffered and died for us on the Cross. Keep us faithful to your will in the darkness of our lives. Give us strength to remember that we are called to transform our world.

**Saturday November 20th**

**Luke 20:27-40**

The Sadducees make their first appearance in this story. This story is about a situation commonly called a levirate marriage. If a man was unable to conceive a child with his wife, his brother could have intercourse with her so that they did not go without children and heirs. Thus the situation that is presented to Jesus is one that could be understood in the culture of the times. It was important, for all kinds of legal and religious reasons, for the family line to continue and so the Law made allowances for this kind of arrangement. The problem was that the Sadducees misunderstood the relevant passages of Scripture as they related what happened after death. Jesus points out to them that the kinds of institutions that exist in this life will not exist in the next. Thus marriage is an earthly institution and not a heavenly one. Throughout the Old Testament there was uncertainty about what happened after death, though in time there was a movement towards belief in an afterlife (Dan 12:2) and the idea of a judgement after death. Josephus, a Jewish writer of the time of Jesus, says about the beliefs of the Sadducees that "as for the persistence of the soul, penalties in death's abode, and rewards, they do away with them...that the souls perish along with the bodies". The Pharisees on the other hand hold that "every soul is imperishable, but only the soul of the good passes into another body, whereas the souls of the wicked are punished with eternal penalties" (Josephus).

One gets the feeling in this story that what Jesus is trying to say to the Sadducees is not just that they are wrong, but that they ought to stop and have a look at the way they are using the Bible. He notes that they are very quick in their use of the Law to support their understanding of the levirate marriage but not so quick in their using it to understand and accept the ministry and teaching of Jesus and about immortality. In other words, they are taking the scriptures and using them to prove their own fine theological points. They know what God says and can read the Bible to prove it! This is a huge danger for all believers (and one which we can see ever present in the approach of fundamentalists and among some evangelicals). God is never so predictable and while it may well be comforting to be able to speak of eternity in human terms and to try and direct God along ways that make sense to our human minds, we should not make the mistake of thinking that is the way it is in reality.

***Prayer***

Father, help us to allow you to be God in the way that you want to be God and to stop trying to shape you into some kind of divine spirit that makes perfect and comforting sense to us.

**Saturday November 13th**

**Luke 18:1-8**

If we were to just look at the parable (verses 2-6) we would come to the conclusion that it is not about a dishonest judge, but about the persistent woman. The introduction and the conclusion expand it beyond this initial sense so that we have the image of the woman praying and the judge judging. If a dishonest judge will listen to the persistent prayers of the poor woman, then how much more will the just judge listen to those who come to him and persist in placing their needs before him. Clearly God is being presented as standing in contrast to the judge. The unjust judge spends ages putting off his judgement but not so with God. In verse 8 we are told that he will "make haste" to help those who come to him in need. The second half of verse 8 also adds another theme, that of faith. We saw in verse 1 that Jesus was introducing the need for Christians to pray always, an activity that depends on the faith life of the person. It is because they believe that God wants to listen to their prayers that they come before him, confident of a hearing and of action. The implication is that if the disciples do not learn to pray always, then when the Son of Man returns, he will not find faith on the earth. Again, in the light of the perceived delay in the return of Jesus, we can sense that Luke is trying to keep his community focussed. Just because the end has not come is not a reason to give up on prayer and preparedness.

There is a sense in which this parable seems to be suggesting that the woman was able to receive a judgement because she "nagged" the judge to the point where he responded to shut her up. Are we then saying that our approach to God is the same? If we "storm heaven" with our prayers, presenting God with our needs day and night, then he will eventually hear us and grant us our wishes. Experience of life tells us that this is not how it works in reality. We can join with others in praying for a particular need and wonder when God will hear us. A literal translation of the Greek used of the woman is "lest by coming, she in the end give me a black eye"! That is not the approach we need for God. The point of the parable is the consistency and persistence in faith; not for the sake of getting what we ask for, but because persisting in prayer is persisting in acknowledging that we are limited and needy people and our heavenly Father is Lord of all things. With that faith we will be filled with peace whatever the result of our prayers.

***Prayer***

Loving Father, we come before you as people in need and ask for your blessing on our lives. Open our eyes and hearts that we may experience this blessing in all that happens to us.

## **Sunday November 14th**

### **Luke 21:5-19**

*Fr Robert Newton*

If people in Australia were to see Federal Parliament, the National Art Gallery, the National Library and the High Court all suddenly destroyed, they would probably feel that the end of things as they had known them was at hand. Some people might get the sense of it being the end of all things. The people of Jesus' times seem to have had a strong sense that they were living near the end of time, that they were on the brink of the coming of the Kingdom of God. According to many of the prophets the coming of that Kingdom would be marked by some frightening signs and events. So when Jesus prophesies the coming destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, his followers take fright. The Temple was God's house, its destruction would be too terrible to contemplate – they thought that such an event would not only be the end of their religious and national life, but a sign of the end itself. Jesus tells us today not to speculate about the signs of the end and that the end will not be all at once. Jesus also warns about not being deceived by people who go about claiming to know the future and speculate about the end of time. Prophets of doom and predictors have their own purposes and agenda. Jesus reminds us to concentrate on the here and now; because we like him may be attacked and persecuted, some of us may even be put to death. The vital thing is to witness to the coming of God's Kingdom now. Holding fast to the Gospel and bearing witness in present troubles is the real task of his disciples.

Christ calls upon us to direct our attention to the present rather than spend our time being over anxious about the future. Holding fast to the Gospel in times of trial and disbelief is the real task for us in the twenty first century, not worrying about the future and what it might hold, lest we be defeated before we start. How many times have we heard it said in our faith communities that a task of the Gospel is impossible before we start; a certain project like a Sunday School or Youth Club are a failure before they are even begun. Disciples of Christ should not be surprised to meet opposition either from their own lack of faith or the pessimism and disinterest of others. We should not be surprised or give up at the first hurdle when we meet opposition or even the persecution of indifference and apathy because these are in fact opportunities to witness the Gospel, to remain steadfast. Do we need to ask ourselves whether we bring to others a confidence that their future is in the hands of a loving God?

### ***Prayer***

15

Heavenly Father, give us the courage not to fear for the future but to place our trust in you and give glory to your name.

## **Friday November 19th**

### **Luke 19:45-48**

Having made his statement about the future of Jerusalem, Jesus now goes directly to the Temple. This is an important scene for Luke, as he presents Jesus the King coming into the city and taking possession of the Temple in the name of his Father. It is as King that, in a prophetic action, he drives out those who are "profaning" the Temple by their buying and selling. It would be wrong to see this as an act of the Messiah preparing for the destruction of the Temple (this seems to be the approach in the versions of the story that are found in the accounts of Mark and Matthew in their Gospels [Mk 11:15ff; Matt 21:12ff]). For Luke it is much more important that Jesus take possession of the purified Temple so that he can use it as a base for his preaching and teaching leading up to his death. The Temple as a building has no prominence in the Lucan Church. In Acts 7:48 we can note that Luke reminds his people that God does not dwell in houses made by human hands.

There were two problems in the Temple. Every Jewish male had to pay an annual tax and while many paid in their own villages, by far the bigger number went to the Temple and paid it directly. The men collecting the tax would accept only the shekel as payment. Any other currency or amount had to be changed. During the changing they would add their own costs and charges. As many of the people coming in to make their offering were poor, it was an enormous cost to them. It was against this injustice that Jesus was reacting. There was also the problem with the selling of animals. Only perfect animals were accepted for sacrifice and there were inspectors on hand to make sure that there were no blemishes. It was therefore easier to buy an animal there in the Temple as it was known to be acceptable. However, documents show us that there were enormous mark-ups on these animals and again the poor carried the burden. The righteous anger of Jesus was directed towards those who came in their simple pious way to offer sacrifice to God and were robbed by the Temple elite. These stalls were even called the Stalls of Annas (the High Priest), an indication of the level of corruption that was to be found there. The Church should not be building barriers to worship but instead finding ways of helping people to come before God in prayer and praise. The primary purpose of a church building is its role in helping people to pray. It is never an end in itself worth preserving at all costs.

### ***Prayer***

20

Father, we are children called to reach out to you in prayer and to praise your Holy Name. May we do so with pure and humble hearts leaving behind all that is unworthy and tarnished.

## **Thursday November 18th**

## **Luke 19:41-44**

We have the feeling, as we read about the progress of Jesus towards the city of Jerusalem, and his death, that the crowds are building up and becoming more and more excited. Luke has Jesus coming to the city as its King and the one who was sent to bring peace (cf 19:38). But he is also a prophet along the lines of his Old Testament ancestors who comes and proclaims judgement on a stubborn city. This passage must be linked to two other sections where Jesus comments on Jerusalem. The first is in 13:34-35 where he offers a lament over Jerusalem, and the exchange with the women while he was on the way to Golgotha (23:26-32). In the first he compares himself to a mother-hen concerned about her chicks and in the second seems to join himself to the weeping women weeping for their children. The peace he talks about in verse 42 is both an absence of war and the complete Old Testament Shalom! Peace is something that God does. When God is present there is peace (the Garden of Eden is the classical biblical picture of what peace means) and here he is, the One sent to proclaim Peace, and the City of God rejects him. The name of the city, Jeru-Salem suggests that it is the City of Peace, yet it cannot accept the King of Peace!

Jerusalem was called the City of Peace but it could not recognize the Prince of Peace in its midst. Why not? It was also the city that had killed the prophets (13:34) and had rejected the messengers of God. Why? Luke seems to put all these feelings into the emotion of Jesus as he weeps for the city. Their efforts for peace were all directed into the wrong things, avenues that would not lead to peace. They had tried the pursuit of wealth, of politics, of religious revival, of turning it into a model Greek city and then a Roman city, a city of the world, but none of it brought them peace. Luke presents Jesus as travelling along the road to Jerusalem proclaiming The Way of Peace, but it was a way that was not pleasing to them. It meant that they had to humble themselves, be open to the possibility of God leading them in ways they did not want to go; they had to live for the poor and the needy, take up their crosses and follow the way of the Lord and be people of the Beatitudes. Then there would be peace. Instead, they took the easy road and put the Prince of Peace to death and not long after that the city was destroyed. That is why Jesus wept for them and why he weeps for us.

### ***Prayer***

Loving Father, in your compassion you reach out to us to offer us your lasting gift of peace but we continually seek it in other places. Turn our hearts that we may allow you to change us.

## **Monday November 15th**

## **Luke 18:35-43**

Jesus comes nearer to the goal of his journey. As he comes close to Jericho he cures a man's blindness, a miracle which provides the backdrop for praise to be given to God (is this the same man as Bartimaeus in the Gospel of Mark — Mk 10:46?). This is the fourth of the miracle stories in Luke's travel account, and the last (13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19). The power of Jesus flows out to set someone free from a physical ailment. The man can see again because of his faith. He "sees" Jesus as the Son of David and acknowledges that he has the power to bring about a cure. We can see links in this story to the account of the ten lepers and the prayer of the rich man in Hades to Abraham in 16:24. There was nothing Abraham could do to help, but Jesus is able to cure the blind man. In Luke's terms it is more than a cure. The man is set free and is now able to go back into the world and live a normal life. This is what proves that Jesus is indeed the Son of David proclaimed by the sick man. We have just seen that the Twelve were unable to understand what Jesus was saying in his prediction of the Passion (they were blind) but here is a man who is physically blind but able to profess his faith in Jesus. It is also helpful for Luke to have Jesus proclaimed as the Son of David. He will soon enter Jerusalem for his trial and death and the crowds will sing out "Hosanna to the Son of David", a messianic figure who has the power to cure the blind. Whatever happens in that city will be happening to a powerful figure under the direction of God. They should not therefore be afraid when things seem to be going wrong.

What is important in the background to this section is the blindness of the Twelve. They were unable to accept Jesus as the promised one of God. This despite the fact that they had seen the many miracles and signs worked by Jesus. Why is that? According to the Gospel writers, it is because they were not prepared to put aside their own expectations and to allow God to work salvation in his own ways. The blind man on the other hand was prepared to simply act in faith and hope. He acknowledged his need and allowed Jesus to do to him as he thought best. One frightening aspect of the story is the thought that it is quite possible for those who think of themselves as being faithful disciples to in fact be failing to listen to the Lord in their lives.

### ***Prayer***

Father, your grace and power is alive in our lives at all times and in all situations. Help us to overcome our blindness and our doubts so that we can acknowledge your presence and allow you to achieve what it is you want to do through us.

**Tuesday November 16th**

**Luke 19:1-10**

We see Jesus responding to the initiative of Zacchaeus and invites himself into the little man’s house. The picture painted by Luke is significant. Jesus does not go to one of the ordinary citizens’ houses, but to a tax collector’s house. He does not go to the house of a righteous person but to the house of a notorious sinner. This, of course, would make Jesus unclean and that too is part of what Luke wants us to note. He is a rich man and we can presume that the bulk of his wealth came from his work as a tax collector and so was tainted. A key statement of Jesus was that “this man too is a son of Abraham”. If a notorious sinner like Zacchaeus can find salvation, there is hope for everyone. He was lost, but has been sought out by Jesus and his life turned around. This last verse sums up the whole of the ministry of Jesus: The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost. This is a fulfilment of the prophecy that we find in the prophet Ezekiel 34:16. There God speaks of himself as the shepherd who would seek out Israel, his flock, who had been scattered among the nations of the world. Here we see a son of Abraham lost in sin who is now saved.

The thing that strikes me about the story of Zacchaeus is what stopped him from seeing the Lord was not really his sight. That simply made it a little more difficult. It was the large crowd that stood between him and Jesus that blocked his way. He could not walk through the crowd because he was a tax collector and a sinner and they would, more than likely, beat him up. He wanted to see Jesus. He wanted to find out more about him but was unable to come near to him and so was forced to climb a tree. What strikes me is that in some ways it is a picture of some aspects of the Church. Far too often what keeps people out of the Church is not the message of the Gospel but the disciples who are the ones who are supposed to be preaching and living out its message. We can be the “crowd” standing between those seeking Jesus and the Lord himself. It can be our way of living, our way of worshipping; the way we respond to the stranger, the sinner, the outcast; the requirements we insist on and our not so bright history as faith communities which keep people away. That is a sad comment and a call to all of us to reflect on how we live out our lives of faith and on what we can do not to be an impediment to another’s faith journey.

**Prayer** Merciful Judge and Father, we ask your forgiveness for the times that we have kept people from knowing Christ Jesus by things we have said and done and things we have failed to do.

**Wednesday November 17th**

**Luke 19:11-28**

This is the last part of the travel story of Jesus. This parable makes further comments on how a disciple should use material goods. The theme of kingship helps to prepare Luke’s readers for the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem where he will be hailed as King (19:28ff). There are two central themes. There is the message of the importance of being vigilant, waiting for the return of the master and being ready when he arrives. To this is added the notion of a judgement based on how responsible the disciple has been in the use of the master’s property. The gifts were given freely with the expectation of a return. This is similar to Matthew’s version (Matt 25:14ff), though Luke goes further. He is partially responding to the community’s expectation that the end was coming soon. The servants do not know just when the master will come back for he has gone to a “distant land”. There is, therefore, a greater need than normal to be alert, lest he come back unexpectedly. In the waiting, proper and appropriate use must be made of the gifts that have been given to the servants, for these will form the basis of the judgement.

Christian disciples have been entrusted with the “secrets of the Kingdom” (8:10). These are free gifts and graces that have been given to them for a purpose. At the end, they will be judged according to how they have used these gifts for the work of the Gospel. The sin of the third man was that he took a minimalist line in his understanding of what it meant to be a believer. He did nothing. He did not go out and waste the money (sin). He simply kept it for himself and therein lies the problem. It is always easier to understand our Christian faith as being something that changes our own lives but the parable tells us that faith is a call to go out and share the gifts of God with others. The purpose of the gifts was not to enhance the life of the receiver. They are meant for the benefit of others. When God reveals himself to us, it is so that we may share that revelation with others. As we experience the love of God, his mercy, his forgiveness, healing and so on, we are called to show mercy to others, to forgive them the wrongs they have done to us, to offer healing and so with all the other gifts God gives to us. We receive them to share them. If we fail to share them then we are failing in our duties. We sin.

**Prayer** Almighty God, we rejoice in the many wonderful gifts that you have given to us, especially for the gift of your Son Jesus. As our lives are enriched with the blessings of his presence, may we live in a way that others may come to know him.