

Ecclesiastes 1: 2, 12-14. 2:18-23

Colossians 3:1-11

St Luke 12:13-21

True life- Set your minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth

It is the American novelist Mark Twain who is generally credited with the saying

Some people are troubled by things in the Bible they can't understand. What troubles me are the things I can understand

I suspect that that both this morning's OT reading and Gospel are just the sort of passages he had in mind. I don't struggle to understand them but they certainly worry me.

So what are we to make of this Sunday's Bible readings?

In the OT reading the writer is not having a good day. Somebody has summed it up very succinctly

This reading has a gloomy theme, as the writer describes all human endeavour as futile, ending in death for everyone.

Then our gospel reading is not easy either. The story of a man asking Jesus to intervene in a family dispute over an inheritance. His teaching is plain

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

We wouldn't want to disagree but from my experience as soon as the scriptures and even more so the preacher starts talking about possessions and money - the defences go up.

What are to make of these readings? What might God be wanting to say to us?

1 One's life does not consist in what one has achieved

The OT reading was from the book Ecclesiastes. The first challenge for most of us is to find Ecclesiastes. Small book – just 12 chapters. After Proverbs before Song of Songs.

There is the first clue to it. Although we are not told who wrote it, tradition attributes it to King Solomon

It is the writing of an old man, looking back on his life. What has it all been about? What have I achieved through all that hard work? Was it worth it?

Conclusion is depressing- deeply depressing

Ecc 1.2,3

Surely we assume there should be no place in the Bible for something that is so negative? let alone to be read in public worship?

Actually I wouldn't agree and believe that this is an important and even helpful book for us,

For these are questions that many of us will have asked in dark moments at different points in our lives Those of us who are retired may very probably have looked back just like Soloman and thought 2. v.18,19

We leave, we move on, we retire and everything doesn't collapse. In fact they seem to get on quite well without me - perhaps even better - Very depressing. We are be tempted to conclude with the writer *I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see , all is vanity and a chasing after wind*

But the person asking these questions is none other Soloman. Yes, a man who was deeply flawed but who is held up by the Bible as the successful ruler. A man who achieved so much - He built the temple - he is the byword for wisdom.

The author of 1 Kings gets carried away in listing Soloman's achievements

4 v.29, 32.

Yet at the end of his life he seems to take no pleasure or account of what he has achieved. It has been toil and vanity.

For Soloman a successful and fulfilled life has not been determined by what he has achieved.

One's life does not consist in what one has done. The length of an obituary in the Times is no proof of a life fulfilled

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments; that is the whole duty of everyone concludes Soloman

2. One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions

In our gospel reading the same point is made in another way

One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions warns Jesus as he declines to arbitrate over a disputed inheritance.

Then speaks plainly *Be on your guard against all kinds of greed*

We will all recognise our need to take that warning to heart but the theory is easier than the practice - we need possessions. The challenge that we face is to learn to live with possessions and not allow them to dominate our lives.

To be able to say with St Paul

I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little and I know what it is to have plenty.

But at the same time we are living in a society that measures fulfilment and success by *abundance of possessions*

So Jesus tells the story of the rich fool.

May know very apocryphal story of the funeral of the successful businessman, who delighted in his wealth. One of the hymns chosen was 'Guide me o thou great redeemer' with its great tune Cym Rhonda,

But there was a typo in the order of service. And so in the final verse all sang heartily

When I tread the verge of Jordan

Bid my anxious fears subside

Death of death and hell's destruction

*land **my** safe on Caanan's side*

We should not forget the old Spanish proverb that *there are no pockets in a shroud*

Take care Jesus warns us *be on your guard against all kinds of greed*

Conclusion

Our OT reading may be gloomy but is a powerful reminder that Life does not consist in what we have done, in what we have achieved

In the Gospel Jesus would leave us in no doubt *Life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions*

I think that the key to this morning's readings lies in the second reading the NT reading from the Letter to the Colossians

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God

There is the message for us in these readings.

In the end what matters is not what we have done

It is not what we have

It is who we are. It is about who we have become and are continuing to become in Jesus Christ.

We are those who in our baptism have died to sin and self

Those whose lives are now hidden with Christ in God.

It is that which is proclaimed in every eucharist.

As we come forward to express our need of him - to receive bread and wine, his sacramental body and blood,

Not to give an account of what we have achieved, or of what we possess but our deep longing to seek the things that are above, to indeed become rich towards God. Amen