

Sunday Thought

25th September 2022 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah 32:1 -3a, 6 - 15
Psalm 91: 1 - 6, 14 - 16
1 Timothy 6: 6 -19
Luke 16: 19 - 31



What's Next?

The State Funeral last week was a really positive statement of faith. It began with the Choirs proclaiming Jesus' promise of resurrection and eternal life. The Christian's faith and hope in the face of death were affirmed in the address by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He reminded us of her Majesty's *Covid Message* and her reference to Vera Lynn's '*We'll meet again!*' I wish he had had more time to give us a further picture of Elizabeth joining '*the enormous crowd from all races and nations who share heaven's glory.*' [Rev.7/9]. He did remind us that we all face the merciful judgement of God. I pray that many people in the crowds and *British-style queues* thought of that for the queen and themselves and asked '*Ok, we all die, but 'what's next?'*'. Justin Welby's assuring words were helpful because there can be a finality about a funeral if it is seen as the last door closing. We believe it is also a new door opening.

Our Gospel reading this week is on a similar theme. It's the story of an unnamed rich man and a beggar called Lazarus. It gives a picture of what may be '*Next!*' The story details are images of truth – don't assume they are necessarily factual – that's how they feel. Both men came to *moving on* time and found their final door opened into entirely different experiences. The rich man's was like being too close to the fire as he writhed in painful regrets. Even on this side of the final door regrets can be painful. I recall Rob who had fought in the Far East during the second world war. Then in a nursing home, he had become very depressed and on one visit he confided the reason why. '*When I die,*' he asked '*Will I meet those people I had to kill? What shall I say?'*' The rich man couldn't find words either. Across a great divide he saw Lazarus, free from his pain and shame, dining in luxury at heaven's top table! He still thought of the beggar as socially inferior and asked God to send him back with a message to warn his five brothers about the dangerous outcomes likely associated with riches. He is told that the brothers already have all the advice they need from scripture and from teachers past and present. They would refuse to take note even if a word did come from beyond the grave. We are regularly sent advertisements encouraging us to save money by taking out a pre-paid funeral account. Maybe people queuing at Westminster had time to consider that, certainly thinking about the cost of what they were watching. Far more important though to take out a Kingdom account as early as possible. The point of the story is to be ready for the time when the door closes and reopens. Now is the time to take out a personal account in kingdom currency of compassionate love and faith in God.

Paul, gives similar advice when writing to Timothy and Christians at Ephesus. He is aware how they live with luxury and poverty side by side in the church as well as the prosperous city where people often witnessed 'Lazarus and rich man' experiences. The churches had accounts troubles – or at least members of them did. The real problem was not a lack of fund-raising. Just the opposite. They



seemed to have too much which Paul says, may well lead to division, diastisfaction, broken hearts and great sorrows. Far better to open a Kingdom account. Invest in faith, love and goodness. Learn to live the satisfied life, trusting in God who called you.

Other deaths have been in the news this week. In Ukraine, horrific accounts of mass burials have been reported, revealing wicked torture of innocent civilians. Exhumations have been carried out from what were once beautiful gardens, fertile fields and leafy woodlands. It was just like that in Jeremiah's home town of Anathoth. The Babylonian armies were ruthlessly destroying the Judaeen countryside. Now they were beseiging the walls of Jerusalem where Jeremiah was in prison. The King had ordered that punishment because the prophet had foretold defeat for the city and for the whole land of Judaea. Worse still he had told King Zedekiah how he, with many of his people, would be take into captivity. The Lord, however, had also given Jeremiah a message of hope. There would be a return to Jerusalem, a reconstruction and a new future beyond the present conflicts. He wanted to give the people a sign of that. The prophet's cousin, Hanamel, back home in war ravaged Anathoth, wanted to sell a family field. It may have seemed a ridiculous thing to do but Jeremiah obeyed the Lord's guidance. Buying the field would be a token of his faith in God's promise for the future. What faith! It was the product of a lifetime spent close to his God of '*all things are possible*'. His kingdom account was well in credit!

The psalmist (Psalm 91) is in credit too. He sings of the Lord's faithful, but conditional support. '*All my care and protection is for those who acknowledge me as Lord by loving and trusting me.*'

The Faith Account: A prayer of life-time trust in God [based on Psalm 91]

Lord, my God, you have made us some wonderful promises.

You will be our carer, protector, and defender,
Often through ministrations of unrecognised angels all about us.
You not only look out for us just when we ask you,
but you go on faithfully continuing to care.
You assure us of these promises and all you ask in return
is that we love you and acknowledge your Lordship over our lives.

I will, Lord, I will. Thank you.

