

14th Sunday after Trinity, Year C

Hebrews 13.1-8, 15-16

Sex, power, money, suffering... tomorrow, the media will have all of it sloshing about; it sells; it's what some people think makes the world go round. Jesus doesn't rate a mention; he doesn't dominate the urgent trivia that is pushed at us day by day, week by week.

Sex, power, money, suffering – and Jesus is found right here in today's reading from Hebrews. The point is though, that Jesus is the one who makes sense of all the rest. He's the same 'yesterday, today and for ever.' Jesus is actually the one who helps us to stand on firm ground. He helps stay on the straight and narrow in the midst of the all of the compounding issues and worries and anxieties that blow our way in the world.

But how does faith in Jesus help sustain and guides us through the choppy seas of employment, of mortgages, of suffering, of everyday pressures in life? How is faith our light in a dark world?

The Picture of Jesus

Let me put it this way, God has been guiding us from the beginning. God has guided and led his people from the early days of the Old Testament, through to its fulfilment in the life of his Son, Jesus. From Jesus, God has continued to guide his people from those early days of the church to our own time and then from here God will continue to guide us. In all of this, Jesus – the Word of God – has been constant. Jesus is the fresh new revelation of God, kind of like meeting someone in person who up until this point you'd only known through letters and the occasional phone call.

That's why the message of the gospel isn't for tomorrow only. It can't be put off until your job's done. It can't wait until you've earned some more money. It can't be put on hold until you've settled down. The challenge of Jesus is for *today*, for this moment, this decision, this difficulty – whatever from they may take.

And Jesus will be the same for ever. In other words, the one who we've got faith in, won't be changing – unlike *so many* things in this world. The one we know by faith today will shall know in person to person in the fulfilled world, the new world that will emerge after the fulfilment of God's promise.

Huge Issues

If we get our picture of Jesus right, the huge issues will begin to fall into place. First, the practical life of the Christian community must be ordered in such a way that generosity and love – the love that reflects and continues to embody God's own self-giving love – will be its central features. We need to continue to care for one another in practical ways. Mutual affection is vital; financial or material help for those who are in need is vital. And the hospitality that we exhibit to one another must be extended wherever possible, with the fascinating promise that you never know when an Angel of the Lord is going to walk in. If it happened to Abraham in Genesis 18; it can happen to you.

Second, the darker side of Christian experience tells us that prison, both literal and metaphorical, has been an ever-present part of Christian life. Right now, there are Christians who languish in literal prisons, metaphorical prisons, for the sole reason of their faith. Praying for and working for their freedom is our task. So is the need to support the ministry of the church to those who are in prison, to those who have been touched by the darkness of this world.

Storm Centres

Now we come to ourselves. There are two constantly perennial storm centres that affect us – directly or indirectly. They are sex and money. Marriage is to be respected and honoured by all, and nobody must try to break into the sexual union of husband and wife. The pagan world of the first century was every bit as promiscuous as our own world is now. The way our society approaches sexual intimacy isn't a new development. The writer of Hebrews warns that God will judge those who flout his intention of the gift of sex, using it as a plaything rather than the deep, rich, satisfying bond between husband and wife that is it is meant to be. This isn't a judgment confined to some sort of future. It happens now. Thousands of novels, plays, poems and films bear witness to the bitter regret and long-lasting emotional scars that frequent those who degrade themselves and other people by indulging in sex outside its proper context.

The same is true with money, which first enslaves people and then mocks them as it fails to provide the happiness it promised. Not that poverty by itself brings happiness, either; let's not have a romantic notion attached to that. But the *love* of money is the thing to beware of. When you love something or someone, you make sacrifices for them. When you find yourself making a sacrifice of something else in your life, simply to follow money, then treat that as a danger signal.

Guiding Light

This may be sober and practical advice but it's also necessary. There's little direction being provided by our society in these areas other than a few basic ideas and principles about following the heart and do no harm to another. What the gospel provides us is solid ground on to which we can place our feet, sure in the knowledge that Jesus, our ever present companion, will provide the way for us to navigate the storms of life. Those who trust in God to be with them for ever, to help them and defend them in and through all circumstances will be far less likely to fall for the temptations of sexual immorality or love of money, both of which so often attack those who are personally insecure. The confident faith of verse 6 is the faith to be imitated. It is the faith for us now and it is the faith that will take us further and give us light when all around is nothing but darkness.

Conclusion

And if we first imitate and then live that faith we will be part of the unshakable life of the kingdom. And the result is glad and uninhibited worship. God wants us to be people who will name the name of Jesus in prayer, worship and testimony, even if it costs us dear. Our witness will bear fruit. And the common life of our Christian community, our life of generous-hearted fellowship, is itself an act of worship. God is delighted with it. God is pleased with what we attempt in his name. To live as Hebrews would have us live is to live a life filled with faith and with worship.