

“And the things of earth.....”

LET’S PRAY:

Lord God hear us now as we pray. We ask that you join us during our worship, and that what we say and do will be acceptable in your sight.

Watch over your people Lord, especially those who lead.

Forgive our reluctance to stand for the faith at times, and renew us as messengers of your Word. Sustain and renew your Church, Lord, in a challenging and apostate world.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen

SONG: Turn Your eyes upon Jesus

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full on his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

1. Oh soul are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness to see.
There’s a light for a look at the Saviour, and life more abundant and free.
2. His words shall not fail you, He promised, Believe Him and all will be well,
Then go to a world that is dying, his perfect salvation to tell.

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BIBLE READINGS:

- Romans 8: 23—24

Who hopes for what he can already see? But if we hope for what we do not yet see, we wait for it patiently. --*Paul the apostle*

- 2 Corinthians 4: 16—18:

Therefore do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.—*Paul the Apostle, for Christian believers in Corinth (similar words Paul uses to Rome 8:24 “who hopes for what he already has?”)*

- Mark: 10

Go sell everything you have, and give to the poor. At this the mans face fell and he went away sad because he had great wealth – *Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour.*

The context of Paul’s letter to Corinth is set against the background of issues within the Church there – Corinth was the home of the goddess Aphrodite. Her temple was a place where deviant sexual rituals and behaviour were practiced – quite a challenge for the church!! How should Christians live in such a corrupt society? In chapter 11 Paul writes about the role of women and men in a loving relationship. Here also is a liturgy for the Lord’s supper – used today.

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Rome was no better, with even more temples to many Roman gods. Again, the church there had many issues to contend with and Paul gives advice on how things should be done – good order in worship, etc. So again Paul refers to the things of earth – the idols and behaviour, all leading to hedonistic lifestyles without any hope beyond the grave (things unseen).

When I began to prepare for this message my thoughts turned to our car and caravan which were the very symbols of our retirement, especially my tow vehicle, a Jeep Grand Cherokee (I was always a car man and the Jeep was kind of special) So, when our downsized house could not accommodate them, it was time to let go of that part of our life (season). The caravan went, then it was the Jeep—with great reluctance it was traded on a Subaru Forester!!

Trifling, perhaps, but Jesus and Paul are both very clear about letting go of the things of earth. It wasn't such a big deal for Lin, as after every holiday she insisted on cleaning the caravan top to bottom. She's not missing it at all!

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples HOW hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! The disciples were amazed at his words, but Jesus said again, “Children how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Then the disciples were even more amazed and said to each other “Who then can be saved?” Bless the disciples for asking the question on every human tongue. Who doesn't like money and some comforts?

Jesus looked at them and said “With man this is impossible, but not with God: all things are possible with God.” The Father longs for ALL of those who seek him—as Jesus said about the rich young man – he looked upon him--- and loved him. Wow!!—Thomas, Nathanael, Zacchaeus etc etc all separated because of earthly things --- but wanted in the kingdom. So we should not build bigger warehouses, but find ways to meet Jesus: Storing up treasure in Heaven. But we are loved regardless! Even as we struggle to come to a lifestyle where we can seek first the kingdom of God.

To conclude my message you will recall the parable of Jesus, the prodigal son. A kingdom parable which Jesus used to explain God's promised kingdom. Luke 15:11—24.

This parable has two very clear messages for us. 1. Forgiveness 2. The passing value of the things of earth. In my time in prison ministry , it was a powerful message for those seeking forgiveness – not just a perfunctory “sorry”. I think it is equally valuable in Jesus' warning to us all about the place of the things of earth.

In that parable the son asks for his share of the inheritance, then takes off to another country and spends it all on loose living, ending up penniless and starving. To earn money he cares for pigs! Not long after he decides that his father's hired help live better than he is living with the pigs. Heading for home and his father, Jesus says the son is repentant AND contrite – “I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” Surprising how often the act of contrition was a bridge too far for many. (I once heard a judge say in court how he lamented the absence of contrition in the court.)

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His inheritance long gone, the father does not ask why, how, where, or when. He just welcomes him. Like Jesus with the rich young ruler, he loved him—even in his fallen state. That then (for me) is the beauty of our faith, and is why the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of the promise of Jesus through grace by way of the cross.

I conclude with a brief look at Jesus’ own earthly ministry. When Jesus witnessed the presence of the things of earth (and the motives behind their presence) in God’s temple, he had no qualms about clearing the lot from that place (Matt 21:12-13 et al). The question (at least one of them) for us can be: To what extent is the contemporary church concerned with the things of earth? The question I ask is: What is the prime mission of the church? Surely it is to know Jesus Christ AND to make him known.

Blessings in Christ. Grant

Prayers for the world:

Father, our thoughts turn to the new Christians from the flame ethnic group in Mauritania and elsewhere in Africa. We thank you for the growth in numbers in the Bethlehem School from 15 to 650 in a place where Christians are despised. Such faith Lord!!

Bless them and watch over them Lord in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Hymn Rock of Ages: AHB 157 *by Augustus Montague Toplady 1740-78*

1. Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee,
let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.
2. Not the labours of my hands, can fulfil thy law’s demands,
could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow,
all for sin could not atone, thou must save, and thou alone.
3. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress; helpless look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.
4. While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyelids close in death,
when I soar through tracts unknown, see thee on thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

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BLESSING:

Jesus said “I have come that you may have life in abundance”

The Blessing of our Lord God Almighty be with you all in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Peace go with you now and always, Amen.

Grant Jewell
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