

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity 2021

(10.10.2021)

Amos 5: 6, 7, 10 – 15; Mark 10: 17 – 31

This morning's Bible readings make preachers rub their hands in glee. Jesus is shown, not just to have a bias to the poor, but positively to have it in for the rich. And Amos, well Amos lets the rich have it with both barrels: they trample on the poor, they're corrupt and they push aside the needy. It's all a wide open invitation for the preacher to indulge in some gratuitous rich person bashing. And there's nothing more excites our self-righteousness than having a go at the rich. Because you know what the definition of a rich person is, don't you? A rich person is someone who is richer than we are. It doesn't matter how much money we have, the threshold for being rich is always that much higher than what we have.

Now this is where I have to be careful. This is where I have *not* to slip carelessly and lazily into saying that, of

course, we really are all wealthy people and we need to repent of our self-pity and recognise that. I know that I'm preaching into a context of significant deprivation. The Priory's is one of the most deprived parishes in the country. There are 12,382 parishes in the country. If parish number 1 is the most deprived, we are number 969. That means that out of 12,382 parishes, there are only 968 poorer than ours. It means we are within the top 8% most deprived parishes. It's probably worth pausing a minute to let that sink in . . . if Boris Johnson wants somewhere to level up, he can come to Brid.

Now, the Priory's congregation is probably not precisely representative of that demographic, again, I do know there are people here whose only income is their state old-age pension, and others on fixed incomes, which might not have been too great a problem over the last 15 years or so, but will be causing some anxiety if inflation does begin to get a grip again.

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Nevertheless, there is stuff in these readings to make us all feel uncomfortable. We are being increasingly encouraged to keep the weeks between the beginning of September and St. Francis' Day as Creation Season. OK, St. Francis' Day was last Monday 4th October – today is St. John of Bridlington Day – so we have just slipped out of Creation Season, but we *are* in the run up to the COP26 climate emergency summit in Glasgow in November. For some reason, for all the publicity there has been, climate change is still not assuming any priority in people's concerns, not even young people.

I can tell you that for my Air Cadets, climate change doesn't really feature on their radar (if you'll excuse the pun.) At Padre's hour this week I had to drag it out of them. Interestingly, and perhaps rather sadly, how prices were a greater concern to them than climate change. Their number one concern is inequality. They're primarily concerned with gender inequality, but they're also concerned with inequality created by

material privilege. And we had to work through how climate change was driving increasing inequality and how they ought to be more concerned with climate change if they want to address inequality. Climate change does drive inequality because the results of climate change are rising sea levels, extreme weather events and loss of productive land; and the people who suffer disproportionately from rising sea levels, extreme weather events and loss of productive land are the poor.

We can all be involved in tackling this. We can be involved through the macro-level stuff our Deanery Dean of Green the Revd Oli Preston, spoke about when he preached here two weeks ago at our eco-Communion. We can be involved by bringing political pressure to bear on the COP26 summit and on the political process generally.

But we can also get involved by altering our lives at the micro-level of our domestic routines. I think Oli

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misspoke, as they say, when he suggested he wasn't wanting us to do this. Knowing him as I do, I know he's extremely committed to making sacrificial adjustments to his personal lifestyle. In fact this week Oli and his young family have given up their car in order to live out their faith based principles of reducing their carbon footprint. Living in somewhere as remote as Bridlington, they're going to walk, or cycle, or use public transport or, if need be, hire a car for a special.

And this is about faith. It's not about sliding away from faith issues and sliding into a political agenda. It's about how we apply our faith and how our faith shapes our lives rather than being a bolt-on set of religious formulae. It's a repeated refrain from the Bible that God is more interested in justice than religious ritual. If we're perpetuating injustice, if we don't even consider the impact our lifestyles have on climate change and how we're driving the poorest

people of the earth into ever increasing desperation and poverty, we're not honouring God.

Every time we thoughtlessly jump into the car because it's more convenient to do so than to spend a few minutes walking, we're being like the people Amos rails against because they push away the needy at the gate. Every time we discard a piece of single use plastic, we're making it that bit more difficult to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, to be able to say with any credibility that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; and we're being that bit more like a camel trying to get through the eye of a needle.

We come here week by week in order to worship God. We do that by being reminded of our dependence on him for our lives; by listening, learning and being challenged by his Word; encountering him in Jesus as he is made real to us in the sacrament and being transformed by that encounter; and then being

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propelled out of church in the power of his Spirit in order to make a difference.

Amen.