



Heacham Parish Church



Sunday 10th October 2021 – Trinity 19

Opening music – *Adrian plays a short improvisation on 'We plough the fields...' by John E West*

Welcome to Heacham Parish Church on-line. This is our Service of Worship for 19th Sunday after Trinity and is also our Harvest Celebration.

We'll be thinking about Harvest on a global scale, in a strange year in which we are made especially aware of the global nature of food supply chains, as for the first time that I remember at least some of the shelves in the supermarket are empty.

In church today we are also celebrating Holy Communion, so we are using some of the liturgy from the Communion service to unite us in church, online, and those reading this from printed sheets as one body, the Church of Jesus Christ.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.

Hymn: **We Plough the fields and scatter**

1 We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
He sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine
and soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
for all His love.*

2 He only is the maker
of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower,
He lights the evening star;
the wind and waves obey Him,
by Him the birds are fed;
much more to us, His children,
He gives our daily bread.

All good gifts . . .

3 We thank You then, O Father,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
for all Your love imparts;
we come now, Lord, to give You
our humble, thankful hearts.

All good gifts . . .

Prayer of preparation

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:
The first commandment is this:
'Hear, O Israel,
the Lord our God is the only Lord.
You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.'
The second is this:
'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
There is no other commandment greater than these.
On these two commandments hang all the law and the
prophets.
Amen. Lord, have mercy.

God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ
to save us from our sins,
to be our advocate in heaven,
and to bring us to eternal life.
Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,
firmly resolved to keep God's commandments
and to live in love and peace with all.

Confession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Bible reading – Mark 10:17-31 read by Barbara

A reflection – by Revd Dan Tansey

I came across a psychological concept the other day that you may or may not be familiar with. The concept is known as the "negativity bias", and it has a powerful impact on how we perceive the world. In simple terms the principle of the negativity bias is that we all tend to look on the downside of things. We tend, as a species, to notice the bad things more readily than we notice the good.

And it turns out this is not only a British phenomenon! It's a trait of all human beings. Apparently the negativity bias is a hard-wired survival instinct in human beings. And, historically, for good reason!

Imagine yourself, in more primitive times, walking in the wilderness and you hear a rustling in the bushes. You don't know what's there. It could be a squirrel. Or it could be a lion! If it's a squirrel then no harm is likely to come to you and you can walk merrily on your way. But if it's a lion then you need to do something about it! Because if a lion jumps out and attacks you there's a good chance you won't survive. So, if it is a lion in the bush, the person who was positive, and cheerfully assumed it was a squirrel would likely get eaten by the lion. Whereas the person who imagined that the noise was a lion, fearing the worst, would have acted accordingly and either ran away or readied their spear for the attack!

Seeing the downside of a situation can be an aid to survival. But it can also blind us to what is good and leave us paralysed by fear. If we were to believe that every rustling in every bush were a lion, then we'd be constantly running away or waving our spears around. Or we may never even leave the house for fear of rustling bushes.

So today I'd like to apply this concept of the negativity bias to this passage from Mark's gospel, which some people describe as being about "the cost of discipleship" when it is in fact about "the rewards of discipleship".

In this passage Jesus reveals a few vital things about how the wonders of eternal life are won, bringing his divine and eternal perspective into the mortal minds of his followers. Jesus reveals that salvation is a matter of the heart. He reveals that salvation only comes as a gift from God. And he reveals that the rewards of following him (through the eye of the needle) are far beyond

our expectations and beyond anything we can imagine here in the world.

So, a man falls at Jesus' feet and asks, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And the detail of his question matters here. He asks about inheriting eternal life, not earning it. As a Hebrew this man is one of God's chosen people, who have been promised the inheritance of eternal life. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be his people. And when God rescued his chosen people from slavery in Egypt he gave them the Law on mount Sinai not as a set of rules that, if they followed them, would gain them entry into his Kingdom, but as a way of remaining in the kingdom over which God rules.

It's an important distinction. The Hebrews were not saved because they followed the rules. They were saved by God's grace and love, and then given the rules by which they may remain in God's kingdom and under the protection of his love.

And so, the man's question seems a little odd. And Jesus answers in two parts. First he asks the man "Why do you call me good?" and reminds him that only God is good. In doing so Jesus does a number of things. He reminds the man that no human being is truly good, and so no human being is good enough to earn unity with God. And so, if no human is being good enough to earn that unity, yet that unity is still possible, then it follows that this unity is only possible if God achieves it for us.

Only God is good enough to overcome the impossible gap between humanity and God. And then, beneath Jesus' question of "Why do you call me good?" is perhaps the question "Do you think I am God?" Do you think that the goodness of God is in me?

Then Jesus returns the man to the Law by asking him if he has followed it. As one of God's chosen people has he followed the rules of life given to him that he might remain in God's kingdom? And the man has followed them, he declares. Yet, somehow, the man knows that he is missing something.

And then Mark gives us the precious words of verse 21: Jesus looked at him and loved him.

And if Jesus is God then, in that moment, God looked at him and loved him. In one simple sentence Mark reveals the full truth of salvation, of the unity that is possible between humanity and God. Mark reveals that, in the mess and confusion of all our efforts and failures, God looks at us and loves us. And it is only his love for us that makes that salvation, that unity and that wholeness possible. And here is that love, revealed in the man Jesus, in the Good Teacher, the presence of God's love in human form, looking at the man and loving him.

And in loving him Jesus knows him. Jesus knows that there is something preventing this man from accepting God's love. Jesus knows that the man has let something get in the way. He knows that there's something in this man's life that he loves more than God. He knows that for this man it is his money. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" is the beginning of the great commandment. But Jesus knows that this man does not love God with all his heart. He loves his money slightly more. He loves his money too much to let go of it. And so, his love of his money makes it impossible for him to inherit eternal life.

So, does this mean that the man will not be saved? This is a point where the negativity bias might kick in. Mark says that the man's face fell and that he "went away sad, because he had great wealth." But is this really the end of his story?

Jesus goes on. He turns to his disciples and says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" And then Jesus gives them that famous analogy: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

It has been popular in recent decades to dismantle this analogy. It has been suggested that Jesus is referring to the "needle gate", a small gate in the walls of Jerusalem and that for a camel to fit through that gate it must shed its saddle and luggage. And so, for a rich man to enter he must be like the camel and strip off all his excess baggage to fit in. But I have a problem with this interpretation. I believe it misses the point. If it's the case that the rich man can enter because he strips off his wealth, then is he not entering by his own merits? Is he not earning entry by having stripped off his wealth? I don't think this is the message Jesus is giving here, or anywhere in fact. This is not the Good News of the grace of God.

What Jesus is saying here is far simpler. The camel was the largest animal in Palestine at that time. The eye of a needle is the smallest possible opening for something to pass through. For the largest animal to pass through the smallest opening is simply impossible!

Jesus' point is simply that it is impossible for a rich man, or for any human, to enter. And when his disciples are amazed and ask each other "who then can be saved?" Jesus answers "With man it is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

All things are possible with God. What is impossible for man is possible for God. The camel cannot make its way through the eye of the needle. It is impossible. But God can bring the camel through the eye of the needle. For God this is possible. All the

camel needs to do is to be willing to be led by God through that impossible opening.

In verse 28 Peter's negativity bias kicks in: "We have left everything to follow you!" he says.

Perhaps with our own negativity bias we read Peter's words with the emphasis "We have left everything to follow you"

Perhaps the emphasis might be "We have left everything to follow you" The point is more about the following of Jesus than what is left behind.

Then Jesus responds: "I tell you the truth" he says. And I paraphrase, "No-one who has left" their family and livelihood "for me and for the good news will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age... and in the age to come, eternal life."

A negative bias might read that we need to earn "eternal life" by giving up everything we have. But Jesus has already said that it's impossible for any of us to earn these things!

We get cause and effect mixed up! He is not saying that by doing these things you will earn your salvation.

He is saying that:

I look on you and love you

As God looks on you and loves

And God can do the impossible for you

For God has chosen you because he loves you

And all you have to do is follow.

Jesus does not say that his disciples have to love him as perfectly as he loves us. That is impossible for us. He says that we need to love him just enough to follow him. Just enough, and his love will achieve the impossible.

And where does Jesus go from here? Where does his love for us lead him? It leads him to the cross. And on the cross the man Jesus leads us through the eye of the needle. And in his resurrection Jesus does the impossible.

Did his disciples follow Jesus to the Cross on Golgotha? No, for the most part they fled in fear. Peter disowned him, three times. But was this the end of Peter's story?

Having failed Jesus at the crucifixion, what was it that brought Peter into the glory of the Kingdom of God? It was the resurrection. It was when Peter and the other disciples met the risen Christ on the other side of death, on the other side of the impossible eye of the needle, that he saw his salvation.

Jesus goes ahead of his followers.

The only man who was ever truly good.

The only man who was God.

The only man who loved as purely as God loves.

The man who went ahead of us all and made the impossible possible.

The man who was God who has made it possible for all of us to inherit eternal life.

What causes God to do the impossible for us?

God's love for us. He looks on us and loves us.

What does Jesus call us to do?

To accept God's love and to love God back. Not perfectly, because we're not capable of perfect love. But enough to follow. Just enough, each day, to follow him.

And when we can't even love enough to follow?

He has given us the Holy Spirit, the breath of his love, dwelling in us as a power of love beyond our own strength.

In Jesus, God's hand reaches through that narrowest of openings and calls us to take hold, to follow, and to be led through the impossible into the eternal.

Let's pray:
Father God,
In revealing your love in your Son,
By the power of your Holy Spirit,
Help us to love.
Amen.

The Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from
heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the
Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at
the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the
dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with
the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who
has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession - Led by Lynda Swain

Harvest

For our prayers of thanksgiving and requests to God I have chosen a number of food items to focus our thoughts and prayers as we celebrate Harvest today. If you are following these prayers at home you may wish to gather these items together – or when you see them around your kitchen perhaps you will remember our prayers.

Honey

Father God, thank you for the pleasure food can bring to us, thank you for the sweetness and generosity of the produce we can enjoy.



Lord, your Word and laws are described as being 'sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb', may we as a nation become more familiar with your Word, may we know the sweetness of your truth in our lives.

We pray for peace and calm amid the worries and concerns about shortages of items in the shops and the lack of HGV drivers to transport what we need. Help us not to be selfish in how we act and to be ever mindful of the needs of others.

Help us Lord to listen to your word and savour it's sweetness. Help us to be followers of your way.

In your mercy, *hear our prayer*

Potatoes and vegetables

Thank you, Lord, for all who work and labour in our fields, to bring the harvest home. We recognise that we are merely stewards of all that you have provided for us.



Give wisdom we pray to those who make policies and decisions that impact on those working on the land or on water, that these may be fair and equitable and protect the resources you have given us.

Lord we particularly lift to you those who have little materially at this time and who are struggling to feed themselves or their families. Lord thank you for the work of organisations like The Trussell Trust and their food banks in Hunstanton and Kings Lynn, give strength to those who volunteer.

Help us to give generously and support the efforts of those who seek to bring practical help to those who are in difficulties at this time.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

Fruits and berries

Thank you Lord, for the abundance of your gifts to us, for the wide variety of fruits and vegetables, meats, and fish that we can enjoy.



Thank you too for the spiritual fruit you have promised us. May we be a church where your fruit flourishes. We pray for all those who give of their time and energy to serving you through their work here in Heacham or elsewhere across the globe. We pray for wisdom for those in leadership in the church and pray for the ministry team and the for the PCC meeting. May the discussions and the decision-making be glorifying to you Lord.

We pray specifically at this time for our vicar Veronica, for Simon and Kaitlyn, may they each know your peace, hope, and love in this difficult season.

We pray for Dan and ask you to strengthen him as he continues in his temporary role here with St Mary's. Lord we ask that you help us all to be a people who overflow with the fruit of the spirit, that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control would be our hall mark.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Wheat and corn

Thank you for the staples in our lives, the ordinary but essential things that we need to live, for our bread, rice, pasta and potatoes and the many other key staples eaten across the world.



We think of those around the world who live under threat of wars and devastation, damaging fields and farms, forests and jungles, habitats for both humans and wildlife alike.



So many who are fleeing conflict, or fear for their life in some way. We pray for organisations like Christian Aid or Tearfund seeking to make a difference and for charities here in the UK working to support refugees and asylum seekers.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Bananas

Bananas remind us of how far our food can travel.

Thank you, Father God, for those all around the world who, labour to provide us with food. We are



understanding more and more how our lives are connected with those many thousands of miles away.

We pray for those who are working to support Fairtrade initiatives and sustainable farming and food production around the globe. Help us to do what we can with our buying power. Help us not to take for granted what we have and what it has cost, for us to have it.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Water

Oh Lord, we thank you for water; a precious and powerful resource and so essential for ensuring a plentiful harvest.

Father God, you have promised us spiritual water that we would never need to know that spiritual thirst again. Help us to return to you to seek this water of life when the cares and worries of our lives dry us out.



Lord we lift to you those we know who are need of the living water today, those who are sick, or struggling in some way, those burdened and stressed, those alone and isolated. We pause to name them before you.....

And so, Lord, let us be like the tree planted by the stream of living water that we would have no fears in times of difficulty, and we would continue to flourish and produce fruit for you.

Father God, *Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Amen

We pray together the Lord's Prayer.....

Blessing

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all goodness and growth, pour his blessing upon all things created, and upon you his children, that you may use his gifts to his glory and the welfare of all peoples; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you and those we love now and always. **Amen**

Hymn: Come Ye Thankful People, Come

1 Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.

2 All the world is God's own field,
fruit as praise to God we yield;
wheat and tares together sown
are to joy or sorrow grown;
first the blade and then the ear,
then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
wholesome grain and pure may be.

3 For the Lord our God shall come,
and shall take the harvest home;
from the field shall in that day
all offenses purge away,
giving angels charge at last
in the fire the tares to cast;
but the fruitful ears to store
in the garner evermore.

4 Even so, Lord, quickly come,
bring thy final harvest home;
gather thou thy people in,
free from sorrow, free from sin,
there, forever purified,
in thy presence to abide;
come, with all thine angels, come,
raise the glorious harvest home.

Dismissal:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Closing music – *Adrian plays 'Now thank we all our God' by
Noel Rawsthorne*

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