

**Trinity 20, Sunday 13 Oct, 2024 - Being right with God
(Amos 5.6–7, 10–15; Mark 10.17–31)**

*May I speak in the Name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit, Amen*

For those of you in Church last week – you will have heard the Archdeacon talk of *'the elephant in the room'*. It reminded me of the song we sang with the children the week before: *If I were an elephant, I'd thank you Lord by raising my trunk.*

As I considered our readings today, I remembered Catherine's advice: *'don't avoid the main point' – the elephant in the room.* So, I've taken her advice - as you would expect from your (new) Associate Priest.

At St Mary's we emphasise the Bible and Eucharist – believing we meet Jesus in both. Before this sermon - we read the OT and Gospel – from Amos and Mark.

From these we find a main point, which today is *'being right with God'*. *Being right with God* is central to the judgements in Amos - and the eternal life question from the man in Mark.

I want to say 3 things about *being right with God*:

- First, it is more than what we do...
- Second, yet what we do, matters....and
- Third, that God is gracious and good...

1st, *being right with God* is more than what we do

Do you remember the song *My perfect Cousin* by the Undertones:

*I've got a cousin called Kevin; He's sure to go to heaven;
Always spotless, clean and neat; As smooth as you'll get 'em.;
Oh, my perfect cousin, What I like to do he doesn't;
He's his family's pride and joy, His mother's little golden boy.
(He'll never be left on the shelf, cause he's in love with himself)*

The Gospel today has someone a bit like Kevin, a bit too good to be true, who asks '*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*' The first thing Jesus says (slightly irritated), is '*why do you call me good, only God is good*', but then answers: '*You know the commandments: You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; Honour your father and mother*'.

'Teacher, the man says, I've kept all these since my youth'. Next time, Jesus answers more bluntly. '*You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, give the money to the poor and follow me*'. But before he said this, the Gospel records: '*Jesus, looking at him and loved him*'.

Jesus spoke bluntly – not because he was irritated with him but because he loved him. Like lots of blunt messages it did not go down well: '*the young man was shocked and went away grieving for he had many possessions*'.

This man hadn't **really** understood the law because the whole law is summed up in one command: *to love God*. And he had a greater love in his life than God – and as a result he was not yet right with God.

So being right with God is more than what we do....

But my 2nd point is what we do, does matter

The *main message* of Amos is that God is concerned about what people **do**. The God of Amos is angry with people for: *trampling the poor; bringing righteousness to the ground; taking bribes and pushing the needy aside.* v11

Amos' God cares for the poor and needy and tells the Israelites that *their behaviour is not good enough* and they need to: *Seek good and not evil, so they may live; and then the God of hosts will be with them.* v14

Amos' God is our God – the Father of Jesus Christ – so when we pray: *'Our Father, thy kingdom come'*, we commit to build God's rule in our lives and communities. God thinks what we do **is** important - judging us for doing wrong and calling us to do right. *Hate evil, love good and establish justice.* v15

It is worth saying that Amos' God does not only call on Israel but on all nations to practice justice, with warnings following *'you have built houses of stone but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine'*. v11

More than almost any other book in the Bible, the book of Amos challenges the people of God on their treatment of others. It points out their behaviour and how it is getting in the way of being right with God.

So, my 2nd point is what we do, does matter.

My 3rd point is that God is gracious and loving.

Let's admit it – these things are hard to hear. Whether its Amos' judgements - or Jesus' tough demands. Yet despite the judgements Amos ends with a hint of hope. *Hate evil and love good, establish justice; **it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to you.***

It may be that God will be gracious. I believe that any reading of the Bible and the story of Jesus, illustrates that God is not only gracious but in both Jesus and the New Testament we learn that *God is love.*

We saw this in our Gospel – *Jesus looked on the young man and loved him.* The first instinct of Jesus – who is the image of the invisible God – is to love. I would have been more inclined to say to this young man (as song) *'you are in love with yourself'*, but Jesus just loved him.

And there is more than a hint of hope in Jesus' words. When the disciples say, *'if he can't get it right with God, what chance is there for us? v26* Jesus says *'For mortals it is impossible but not for God; for God all things are possible.'* v27

This hint of hope from Amos' God in the OT becomes a salvation plan from a loving God in the New. The impossibility of people getting right with God is made possible through Jesus.

So my 3rd point is that God is gracious and loving.

In conclusion, where does all this leave us?

With bad news and good news.

First the bad news. This young man (a bit like perfect Kevin) can't get right with God by good works alone because he had a greater love in his life - money. Jesus says, *'how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom, it's easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle'*. In other words, it's impossible!

But the good news is that with God the impossible is possible. Jesus said to him *'sell all that you have and come follow me* ^{v21}, and then you will be right with God. This is not a literal command to us – Jesus is not saying put everything up on Ebay - he is talking about our ultimate priorities – our ultimate love - is it God or ambition, comfort, family or money?

None of these things are wrong in themselves – but prioritising them over love for God – means that we will never be right with God. In fact, Jesus reassures Peter *'no-one who has left house or family or fields for my sake, will not receive them a hundredfold in this age **and** eternal life'*.

In other words – the promises of God are for now and for eternity. All **we** need to do is love God – something that can seem easy at times and impossible at times – but remember, with God all things are possible.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.