

Luke 12: 32-40. Sermon at Christ Church, Oakworth and also at St. John's Newsholme on Sunday 7th August 2016.

By Sharon Quinn

Lord, we ask that you speak to our hearts and minds, help us to have a deeper faith, and trust in you.



It's not about looks in God's Kingdom

I have tried to smarten myself up a bit for when I am leading a church service, or preaching a sermon. You may have noticed today! I am usually wearing jeans and my hair usually looks like it is free to do just whatever it likes.

As my mother in law once said to me "it looks like you've been dragged through a hedge."

My mum in law looks quite posh though, she wears lipstick and full make up and solid gold jewellery,

even when she's not going out of the house that day! Whereas in comparison, if anyone were to call at my house unexpectedly, no matter what time of the day, I could be wearing mis-matched pyjamas, with my 'dragged through a hedge hairstyle' and definitely no make up!

So you've all been warned, if you do call round, don't expect me to look anything like this. Or to expect my house to be clean and tidy either!

My mum in law is used to me now though, after 21 years of getting

to know each other. She wasn't surprised when I turned up to her house asking for her help in making this new skirt that I'm wearing, to fit me in length.

So she's cut about a foot off the bottom and neatly sewn a brand new hem. It isn't just plain vanity that has made me put some thought about what to wear when I'm here, there are practical reasons too.

I once had a bit of a 'wardrobe malfunction' whilst serving the wine during communion. I was wearing a vest underneath a very see through blouse. I hadn't realised that the vest had just rolled up from the bottom, leaving my whole belly exposed, in very close proximity to all those who were receiving communion that day!

Before you all nod off to sleep with the boredom of thinking this is a sermon all about me, me, me or just about make up and fashion, it is relevant to the message that Jesus is still trying to teach all of us today, just as Luke was trying to get his audience to learn.

Ready for Action

As we are told to do in today's gospel reading from Luke, we *are* dressed for action! People in our congregation have kindly made sure that all the lamps *are* lit. We have also said our prayer of preparation, offered our penitence for our sins. We have sang The Gloria in the knowledge that we have been forgiven by God, through Jesus, for those sins.

We have read some holy scripture, a very small part of the infinite story of God. So, as written in Luke, we *are* now completely ready for whatever comes our way!

But are we ready? Well I don't know about you but I'm not even ready to give away the drawer full of handbags that I'm still hoarding at home! I've already given away a drawer full of bags and shoes

which I worked really hard for! Surely I deserve to keep those!

Be ready to give.

According to Luke, Jesus is directing his lesson at the disciples when he says to them *'sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor.'*

The King James version may be a more helpful translation with the wording *'sell your belongings and give alms.'* The word 'alms-giving' originally in the Greek meant 'compassion' or 'fellow feeling', and 'gift'. This translation certainly lets us off the hook if we are to read it literally, meaning we aren't expected to give *all* of our possessions away to the poor after all.

We *are* being taught here, especially as Christians, that 'giving alms can benefit those in need but also creates a closer community between the 'haves' and have-nots.' (*John Gillman, 2002, Luke, p121*).

The lesson here is to show that those who are financially well off can learn what it is like for someone who has nothing else *but* God, to rely on.

We have all seen examples on TV of children in other countries, who to us, appear to have nothing, no clothes, shoes, swollen bellies due to lack of nutrition. Yet they give a huge smile to the camera, often professing how much they love God. They don't blame God for whatever comes their way, for their many worries, they gain strength from Him instead.

Ready to serve

I don't think that God is expecting us to give up this building or all that we have and give it all away. I do believe that what we have read today is reminding us that, as Christians, we should try to be in

an attitude like the servant, who is ready for Jesus to return at any time. Ready to open that door to anyone, at any time. To not give our hearts to our possessions but to give our hearts to God. It is us that should try to be dressed for action, ready to serve.

Jesus is saying not to overly worry about our lives. In the previous chapters he reminds us that the ravens are provided for, even though they are known as being unclean birds who don't even reap or sow, yet God still provides for them. We, as the modern disciples of Christ, are surely more important than the birds. So why worry?

The disciples had already given up all of their possessions to follow Jesus, and so they inevitably had many worries about their future lives. So the message here is to *'not be afraid, little flock'*, because the Kingdom that we have been encouraged to look for, is now available to us, as a gift, from God.

It is a challenging verse to read that *'when he knocks'*, to *'be ready to open the door to him at once'*.

It took God nearly 40 years to get me to even begin to believe that I should at least try to be ready. I am still not like that servant that is ready 'at once' and willing at any time to open that door to serve. There are so many distractions. So many other things to worry about.

God changes hearts and minds. I'm saying this as a very bold and faithful statement. Yes, there are many who are free to argue against that. I really believe it, I know it to be true in my life, also I know it to be true through the sharing of your own stories about your lives, about God in your lives.

God works on more than appearances

I have the comparison and hindsight of the past when I was that person arguing against any existence of God. I had to gain enough trust or in my case get so desperate before I put any trust at all in God with my life, to see if He could do any better than me!

I had to have a change of heart and mind before God could really help to heal my many worries and to help me to honestly work through them.

Our readings, our past, our experiences, make it clear that being a Christian doesn't ensure us a smooth and easy life. We are called not to put our hearts and energy into the importance of our possessions. We are encouraged to use them well so that others can clearly see what the knowledge of God's love is really like. We are called to look beyond a person's clothing, a person's circumstances or looks.

I watched a short film on the internet where a man dressed in a hooded top and jeans acted as though he had passed out on the pavement and he just lay there. Some people did glance at him but quickly walked passed, nobody approached him to ask if he was ok. The man acted out the same scenario, but this time he was wearing a smart suit, tie and polished shoes. Many people instantly rushed to his aid, asking if he was ok.

It isn't easy trying to be ready as a Christian, as a disciple of Christ, to remember that we could be meeting Jesus at any time, or thinking 'what would Jesus do in this situation?' It is difficult, even risky to look beyond materialistic possessions or clothing, to decide who 'deserves' to be helped and who doesn't!

By the way, I bought this jacket (see photo) from the Sue Ryder charity shop. I thought it was expensive at ten pounds. But it is a Marks & Spencer's and it had the new tags still on.

Our real treasure

Far more importantly than my jacket or how we look, is the fact that, we have spent time getting to know one another, we have united in many forms of worship, as well as many social events. We have often shared our spiritual hearts and minds with one another. We have had many conversations about how to reach out more to help all in our community. We can unite in prayer and communion, truly lifting our hearts to the Lord.

Our church buildings are really important to us all, but even if we did give it all away, we would still have our biggest treasure, the love of God, in our hearts and minds.

We would find another way to unite in faith, build new foundations, we would continue to grow in our trust and love of God wherever we are, and share this hope with others, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen.