

Sermon notes

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Introduction

These notes are based on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for Sunday 18 October 2026. This can be celebrated as The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity or the Feast of St Luke (which falls the following day). This year, Church Action on Poverty Sunday's theme is food, faith & fellowship. Depending on the form of service and the readings used, these aspects may occur naturally in the worship and the life of the church. You may find opportunities in the sermon to draw on these links.

Scriptures for The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

■ Matthew 22.15–22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' ²¹They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Chapters 21-23 of Matthew's Gospel begin with Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as we move towards Jesus' fifth and final discourse, on the Destruction of the Temple and the End of the World (chapters 24-25) and then his Death and Resurrection (chapters 26-28). In jubilation, the people have welcomed their Messiah, and Jesus starts to teach those who would be his disciples the true nature of the kingdom of God. This takes place in the temple, where the religious leaders clearly realise he is exposing their hypocrisy. The Pharisees, with their dominant interpretation of orthodoxy, and the Herodians, closely aligned with imperial Rome, unite in their determination to discredit Jesus. Their foot-soldiers are sent with flattering words and a toxic issue. Either answer to their binary question would discredit Jesus either with the people, who hated the Roman's imposition of their annual head tax, or with the State itself, for whom dissent was rebellion.

- Are there examples today where false moral teaching combines with the establishment to preserve the status quo and resist Jesus's radical teaching about the true nature of the kingdom of God?
- Are there popularist moral choices presented in simplistic terms to entrap and discredit good people rather than inspire Godly behaviour?

Matthew has already recorded Jesus's challenge to the popular presumption that the possession of riches was evidence of God's approval (19:16-26). Writing predominately for Jewish Christians, he has already recorded Jesus's attitude to the temple tax (17:24-27). Now, here in the temple, where authorities insisted on their own currency and profited as money-changers, Jesus tackles the fundamental issue of economic subservience to the State. Imperial powers use money to stimulate the generation of wealth and taxation to control its distribution. To the contemporary quip, that only death and taxes are inescapable, Jesus shows how to overcome them both.

Jesus reframes the question. He asks them to produce a Roman coin, even though as devout Jews none of his questioners should have such with them whilst in the temple. He shows that loyalty to the state is not an absolute. Caesars stamped their image on coinage to emphasise the ubiquitous nature of presence – and some Caesars had already declared themselves to be divine. As St Paul teaches (Romans 13), we don't pray to worldly powers as the ultimate authority, rather we pray to God for those in positions of power.

Jesus reminds those listening of the deeper truth that God has created us in his image, so that, to whatever extent it is right to grant the secular powers their due, how much more should we demonstrate our total allegiance to God for everything that we are.

- How can we reframe today's questions as we speak truth to power?
- Where do ethics take precedence over economics?
- How can money be a force for good?

■ 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

St Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are amongst the very earliest of the New Testament scriptures. This first letter, written along with his companions Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, comes after their missionary visit had been cut short (Acts 17:1-9). Together they rejoice in the faithfulness of these new Christians, despite their experience of persecution. God is praised for the way in which the church's witness to the good news is known far and wide. The new converts had followed the example of the

evangelists and set an example for others to follow.

- When we are engaging with other groups of Christians, do we begin with reasons to thank God for their faithfulness?

In these letters there is a lively expectancy of our Lord's return, with exhortation to sincerity of faith rather than moral laxity or laziness. With the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the old age of wickedness is coming to an end, and the new age of righteousness has already begun. Jesus will rescue us from God's wrath.

- In this time of transition, how are our lives aligned with the values of the Kingdom rather than the values of this world?
- Together as a church, what witness do we give to God's grace and peace at work amongst us?
- Where are we on the journey to becoming a Just Church?

■ Exodus 33.12–end

¹²Moses said to the Lord, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." ¹³Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' ¹⁴He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' ¹⁵And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. ¹⁶For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'

¹⁷ The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' ¹⁸Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' ¹⁹And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' ²¹And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; ²²and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

For those following the Revised Common Lectionary's continuous strand of OT readings, this year since Trinity, we spend eleven Sundays looking at the Book of Genesis, and a further eight on Exodus, culminating in today's passage. Israel had sinned greatly in making the Golden Calf as an object of worship. God, who had originally promised to be with Moses and the people, declares his intention to abandon Israel because of their disobedience. Moses protests that without Yahweh's (God's) presence both he and the people are nothing. God reaffirms his commitment to Moses and the people, and allows Moses an even more intimate experience of his presence.

- We know that it is only if God is with us, that we can be his people in this place
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■ Psalm 99

- ¹ The Lord is king: let the peoples tremble;
he is enthroned above the cherubim: let the earth shake.
- ² The Lord is great in Zion
and high above all peoples.
- ³ Let them praise your name, which is great and awesome;
the Lord our God is holy.
- ⁴ Mighty king, who loves justice,
you have established equity;
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
- ⁵ Exalt the Lord our God;
bow down before his footstool, for he is holy.
- ⁶ Moses and Aaron among his priests
and Samuel among those who call upon his name;
they called upon the Lord and he answered them.
- ⁷ He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud;
they kept his testimonies and the law that he gave them.
- ⁸ You answered them, O Lord our God;
you were a God who forgave them
and pardoned them for their offences.
- ⁹ Exalt the Lord our God
and worship him upon his holy hill,
for the Lord our God is holy.

In the first three verses, the Psalmist proclaims the greatness of God. The fourth verse describes his actions, establishing equity, executing justice and righteousness.

- How does the practical outworking of our praise lead us to support the establishment of equity, justice and righteousness?
 - How does our worship lead into becoming a Just Church?
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■ Isaiah 45.1–7

¹Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
and the gates shall not be closed:
²I will go before you
and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
³I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the Lord,

the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I surname you, though you do not know me.

⁵I am the Lord, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.

I arm you, though you do not know me,
⁶so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the Lord, and there is no other.

⁷I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the Lord do all these things.

Chapters 40-66 form the middle section of the prophet Isaiah, covering the period between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the downfall of the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC. The Oracle concerning Cyrus, Chapter 44:24-45:7 is its central portion of which today's reading is the latter part. Israel, God's people, have been taken into captivity and Isaiah has prophesied their salvation. Now he declares how this will happen – God will anoint Cyrus, heathen king of Assyria, to overthrow the empire of Babylon (Iraq) and save his people.

This is radical. This is God using a ruler, who owes him no allegiance, to fulfil his divine will and restore his people, Israel, to the land promised to them.

- How for us does the Oracle concerning Cyrus speak into our times?
- Through whom is God at work to give liberty to those who are oppressed?
- How do we pray for our rulers that they may be instrumental in eradicating poverty?

As well as showing God's sovereignty goes beyond those who are faithful, the oracle ends proclaiming that the good and the bad, the light and the darkness, the wellbeing and the woe are all part of his creation. For those in a dark place, full of woe, uprooted from their home-land and held in captivity in Babylon, God is fully present.

- How do we listen to those who testify to God's presence in the least expected corners of our society?
 - How does that lead to liberty for those who are oppressed?
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■ Psalm 96

- 1 Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord and bless his name;
tell out his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations
and his wonders among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised;
he is more to be feared than all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the nations are but idols;
it is the Lord who made the heavens.
- 6 Honour and majesty are before him;
power and splendour are in his sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples;
ascribe to the Lord honour and strength.
- 8 Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name;
bring offerings and come into his courts.
- 9 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
let the whole earth tremble before him.
- [10 Tell it out among the nations that the Lord is king.
He has made the world so firm that it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it;
- 12 Let the fields be joyful and all that is in them;
let all the trees of the wood shout for joy before the Lord.
- 13 For he comes, he comes to judge the earth;
with righteousness he will judge the world
and the peoples with his truth.]

In this great psalm of praise, one aspect of God in action is singled out – “he will judge the people with equity” vs 11 and “he comes to judge the earth; with righteousness he will judge the world and the peoples with his truth” vs13

- How does the practical outworking of our praise lead us to support the establishment of justice, equity, righteousness and truth?
- How does our worship lead us to become a Just Church?

Scriptures for The Feast of St Luke

■ Luke 10: 1-9

¹The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."'

As we celebrate St Luke (whose feast day is October 19), we draw on the missional theme of the Gospel that bears his name and of the Acts of the Apostles, which shares its authorship. In this central part of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has now begun his journey to Jerusalem. In the previous chapter, the Twelve have already been sent out on mission, as well as messengers into villages on the road to Jerusalem. Now seventy (-two) are sent out in pairs. This number reflects the number of the nations of the world, as recorded in Genesis 10 (numbered 70 in MT, 72 in LXX). The original outreach is on the road to Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria, yet through Luke/Acts there is a commitment to the Good News of Jesus reaching every nation. As they go, they are told to pray that the Lord will assign even more of his workers to this urgent task.

- Where within our community might we be called to go carrying Good News?
- Let us pray that the church might concentrate its resources on the proclamation of Good News
- Whilst now might be the time for the hard labour of the harvest, let us be grateful for all the preparatory work which has already taken place.

Luke is realistic about the dangers for those sent out. They are as vulnerable as lambs among wolves. Rather than delay until suitably defended, they are to go with the meagre resources they already have and not to be distracted on the way. They are to seek out a warm welcome from amongst those they are called to serve. They don't know where they will be invited in. They offer peace to all and embrace those who respond in the sharing of that peace.

- How vulnerable are we prepared to be when we respond to God's call? When does preparation become an excuse for inaction or delay?
- Whilst we may come with peace into communities which we don't yet know, the Good News comes alive when we connect with that peace which is already present.

The Seventy (-two) are to stay with their hosts, eating together in fellowship. As with the gospel writer's identification with the Good Physician (Col. 4:14), priority is given to cure the sick. In anticipation of the arrival of Jesus on his way through to Jerusalem, his messengers share the life of ordinary people and bring health and wholeness. They proclaim that, in truth, the Kingdom of God has come near to them

- It can be a sign of the Kingdom and a place of healing when we accept hospitality and eat together with those we seek to serve.
- Where in our community can we be bold to say, "the Kingdom of God has come near"?

■ 2 Timothy 4: 5-17

⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

⁶As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

⁹ Do your best to come to me soon, ¹⁰for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. ¹²I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. ¹⁵You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

¹⁶At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them!

¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

The context of the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) is of Paul's imprisonment in Rome. There is much concern about the Gnostic heresies. There are also deeply personal touches, including "only Luke is with me". In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke joins Paul and Timothy and Silas as they cross over to Macedonia to begin sharing the Good News with the Gentiles.

- Who has been with you when ministry has been exciting, and has then stuck with you through difficult times?
- To whom have you remained committed through good times and bad?
- In what ways does our shared fellowship support one-another in ministry?

■ Isaiah 35.3–6

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.'

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert.

The Prophet Isaiah promises to those in captivity in Babylon, that God will come to save them. There will be healing and wholeness. Deserts will blossom.

- What message do we have to share with those who are oppressed?
- How will those who live with disadvantage praise God for his work amongst them?

OR

■ Acts 16.6–12a

⁶Paul and Timothy went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.

Luke, writing in the Acts of the Apostles, records when the mission of the church was diverted to Gentile towns rather than to Jewish communities within towns scattered throughout Asia Minor. (Previously there had been the conversation of an occasional proselyte or God-fearing Roman.) It is at this point in the text that reference to the first-person plural (we) begins. Luke, the narrator, joins Paul, Silas and Timothy as they cross over to Macedonia on the western side of the Aegean Sea to evangelise the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea and Corinth, before returning to Ephesus on its eastern coast.

- We know the power of personal testimony. How can we give voice to those who can speak of their own lived experience of God’s grace at work in their lives?
- How ready are we to hear God’s call to switch our focus from an existing ministry to a new one?
- Luke was present when, prompted by the Spirit, the church went beyond its familiar boundaries and embraced the wider world. Can we be part of our church breaking free of self-imposed limits, finding new ways to bring God’s Kingdom of justice and peace to the wider world?

■ Psalm 147: 1-7

¹ Alleluia.

How good it is to make music for our God,
how joyful to honour him with praise.

² The Lord builds up Jerusalem
and gathers together the outcasts of Israel.

³ He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up all their wounds.

⁴ He counts the number of the stars
and calls them all by their names.

⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his wisdom is beyond all telling.

⁶ The Lord lifts up the poor,
but casts down the wicked to the ground.

⁷ Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make music to our God upon the lyre;

The Psalmist’s outpouring of praise is equally inspired by his mastery of the stars as by his compassion for the brokenhearted.

- Where do we see the Lord lift up the poor but cast down the wicked to the ground?
- In what ways are we part of Just Church?