

Words or Action?

The homily given by Rev Dr Michael Paterson
at the St Margaret's eucharist on 7 November 2021

The readings were 1 Kings 17.8-16, Hebrews 9.24-28 and Mark 12.38-44



Today's Gospel makes for pretty uncomfortable reading, especially if you are wearing a long robe, have one of the best seats in the synagogue and your job is to say long prayers Sunday by Sunday.

And, while I don't actually devour widow's houses, I am all too aware that in choosing to have me as your priest you are going to need a lot more widow's mites to break even.

So you could say you are off the hook as far as today's Gospel is concerned and that this week – at least – you can go home scot-free.

But let's hear that Gospel again in the light of COP26.

"Beware of world leaders, who fly private jets half-way round the globe, who sleep in five-star hotels and are guaranteed the best seats in conference centres, who make fine speeches, give autographs and seize photo opportunities.

"Beware of what is veneer and what is genuine; beware lest their words impress while their actions oppress; beware of what's for show and what's for real."

Phew, we might say, thank God I'm not a priest or a politician at COP26. Thank God that Gospel is not about me.

But let's hear it one more time.

"Beware of Christians who are outraged by those in power, but neglect to use what little power they have for the good of others.

"Beware of Christians who ask how world leaders will offset their carbon footprint, but who never audit their own.

"Beware of church folk who say all the right prayers, but whose church-going makes no difference whatsoever to how they live their lives."

'Oh dear! That Gospel is getting a wee bit too close for comfort', I hear you say. So let me offer an alternative:

"Hear the Gospel, the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the poor of our world.

"The Gospel of those who will never be invited to speak at a conference or sign a treaty.



“The Gospel of those who refuse to do nothing just because they can’t do much.

“The Gospel of those who do good, not as a hobby, but as a way of life.

“The Gospel of those who go without to count others in.

And give thanks to the Lord for the glorious Gospel of those who get up each day to give and not to count the cost.

Friends, it’s easy to hear today’s Gospel and thank God that we are not scribes and Pharisees.

It’s easy to hear today’s Gospel and point the finger at world leaders who are not a bit like us.

But it takes real honesty and courage to face the challenge that this Gospel might just be about you and about me.

Speaking personally, I would rather someone else was preaching today and I was sitting where you are. Because underlying today’s gospel are two piercing questions which challenge me to the core.

The first is this:

Am I a part-time or a full-time Christian?

And the second is:

Am I a person of religious words, or am I a person of Christian action?

And what about you?

Are you a part-time or a full-time Christian?

And are you a person of religious words or a person of Christian action?

And if, like me, you are not entirely proud of your answer, then the words of the hymn we sang to welcome this most unwelcome of Gospels give us the chance for a new start this morning.

“All for Jesus, all for Jesus” – not what’s left when I get round to it,

not the scraps of my energy or free time, not the loose change that I won’t miss, but my own widow’s mite.

ALL for Jesus. **ALL** for Jesus.

Let’s stand and sing the hymn together and make it an act of commitment and renewal.

All for Jesus — all for Jesus,
this our song shall ever be:
for we have not hope, nor Saviour,
if we have not hope in Thee.

All for Jesus — thou wilt give us
strength to serve thee, hour by hour;
none can move us from thy presence,
while we trust thy love and power.

All for Jesus — thou hast loved us;
all for Jesus — thou hast died;
all for Jesus — thou art with us;
all for Jesus crucified.

All for Jesus — all for Jesus —
this the Church’s song must be;
till, at last, we all are gathered
one in love and one in thee.

May it be so this week. Amen.

Let’s join in the Creed for our Planet together

A Creed for the Planet

We believe that this is God's world
and all that lives on it;
**we believe that living gratefully
and giving generously
are marks of faith.**

We believe that all of humanity
should have equal access
to the earth's resources,
**and that every individual must now act
to preserve this world
so that the children of tomorrow
will not be burdened
by the mistakes of today.**

And so we commit ourselves
**to think globally,
to trade fairly,
to live responsibly,
and to love this world as God loves
it, who in Christ become one with
creation. Amen.**

The illustration is one of a series of Gospel illustrations by Cerezo Barredo that you can enjoy – and be moved by – at <https://tinyurl.com/tsbv642k>.

As it says there: “There are liberation theologians ... and there are ‘liberation painters.’ Maximino Cerezo Barredo is one of them. His drawings have been running, over the past decades, through Latin American publications and passing from one to another without copyrights or royalties, from photocopy to photocopy until they wear out and become almost unrecognizable ... as true “property of the Latin American People” that are. Now they entered the era of digitization ...”