

Right now we need you more than you need us!

There are many reasons for not going to church: two of them are: I can be a Christian without going to church; I find God elsewhere.

But perhaps the point is not what we are getting elsewhere or finding elsewhere, it is what the church is missing by your not being here.

And I am not talking about numbers or success or posteriors on seats. I am talking about something considerably more important.

I am talking about holding the church accountable; challenging the church to be what the parish needs it to be and what God wants the church to be.

Some people say church is irrelevant – how can that possibly be? That means that God is irrelevant to his creatures, to community, to creation. We only have to lift and open our eyes to see the result of attempting to remove God from our society. It would take too long this morning to track the descent of humankind into this existential crisis, sometimes referred to as the failed secular experiment. Suffice it to say that the world desperately needs God to be returned to his rightful place as the focus of our worship, our aspirations and desires. The world desperately and urgently needs the church to know this, to take responsibility for it and to help humankind to rekindle their love of God and their gratitude and service to him. Otherwise, are we not simply moving the deckchairs on the Titanic?

Now some of you hearing this are really cross because you have important jobs, or you think I am being depressing or you have turned off and are checking messages on your 'phone.

So let us turn our attention at our gospel reading and see what it teaches us this morning. There is Lazarus at the gate and the affluent diner at the table.

What is wrong with this story? Isn't it obvious? Mean rich person and neglected poor person. Be nicer, more generous, less greedy. No it is Luke, the meaning is much more nuanced.

There is a rich man and a poor man. It was ever thus. Even Jesus said: you will always have the poor with you.¹

Perhaps the point is, where is our focus? Is it in the world and its rewards, or in eternity?

Abraham says to the rich man after he has died:

“Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.

¹ John 12.8; Matthew 26.11, Deuteronomy 15.11

This is not about punishment for being rich. This is about not seeing reality – eternal reality.

Why are there poor people in the world? Perhaps simply so that we see them.

One of the reasons Generation Z, so they say, is not coming to church is that there are few opportunities for them in the church to work for justice and alleviate oppression.

It is not that young people are selfish but that they do not see the church as the place where they can satisfy their adolescent passion for social justice. These are statistics – don't shoot the messenger.²

Where do they go when they are not being over-parented? Social media mainly and there lies madness literally!

But maybe they have a point, about the church not being the place where they be part of a movement for justice and alleviation of oppression.

So if we do not see the poor as people it is because we do not want to. I would suggest that a world without God and an eternal perspective supports, albeit passively, systems and behaviours that exploit the poor and make their lives more miserable.

The poor man under the table is not asking to be invited to sit with the rich man; actually, he is not asking for anything, he is simply waiting for some of that abundance to trickle down into his hungry, silent mouth. We know how effective trickle down is in alleviating poverty.

It is the rich man who cries out for comfort: send Lazarus, he cries to Abraham, to dip the tip on his finger into water and cool my tongue! Interestingly he still sees Lazarus as a servant. This is a difficult habit to break even though all the evidence points to a reversal of status in eternity.

We as a church are not here to invite you into our happy home or join in with our entertaining activities. We are here to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

John 3.16

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'

That's it really – all of it – in a nutshell. That is why we are here – we need to know why you are not here.

I do not know what happens after we die – no-one has come back to tell us. But God sent his son to earth to tell us how to be saved from the worst of it.

I think this is the point of the story this morning.

² <https://www.barna.com/> Barna report on worldviews and church going 2022, 2018

If our focus is on life eternal – if our perspective is a Godly perspective – we will firstly not be concerned about our circumstances in the world here, secondly, we will see the world for what it truly is – through the eyes of God.

Thirdly we will want to make sure that all our neighbours, our children, our relatives wake up to eternity here on earth, before it is too late. I know this is not a popular view but really there is no other conclusion from the gospel reading this morning.

The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house to warn them.

The chilling words of Abraham are that they will not listen – they have had prophets, preachers, the bible, and they have not listened.

Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead to save us from our sins and bring us into eternal life, heavenly life; awake and tuned in to the truth of God.

Perhaps we do get another bite at the apple when we meet Christ Jesus at the point of death and see him for who he truly was, is. I don't know. But ask yourself the question, why would you want eternal life with Christ Jesus if you do not believe in him?

Romans 10

9because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

13For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

O, but here, right here, is a verse that brings us back to where we started.

14 (But) how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' ³

And this, my friends, on this Open Church Sunday is why we need you more than you need us:

You need to speak and we to listen, you need us to build a church that brings you good news; no more, no less.

In fact that is the only job that Jesus asked us to do – everything else is passing away; the work we do for God will stand for all eternity.

If we take God out of the equation, what have we got?

We have a space. Something is missing. Our life in eternity, and yours depends on finding it before it is too late. Amen.

³ Romans 10