

## **Trinity 21 (2013)**

### **2 Timothy 4**

*New International Version (NIV)*

<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

<sup>16</sup> At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Luke 18**

*New International Version (NIV)*

<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

<sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

<sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

I once read a book many years ago, recommended by a colleague with a passion for life but a life without faith. The book was written by a similarly minded individual, whose name has long been wiped from my memory banks, but he was one of those career motivators, who said,

“most people die in their 40s and are buried 30 years later”

Now you've heard me say this before, that I don't really care what people think of me.

What really matters is what Jesus thinks of me. And I suppose I need to add that I do care what people think of my churches, not because that would be a reflection on me or my ministry, but that it could also reflect on what them out there think of Jesus.

I'm coming back to what people think of The Church and our faith later, but there's one common perception that bothers me, that the church is God's departure lounge full of people nearing their time, watching the departures board desperate not to miss their final flight.

Paul's letter to Timothy is from a man who knows his end is near,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”

Now I know I'm on very thin ice this morning, and please don't be offended, but since arriving at St Peter's I've been aware of a similar mood. It's a bit like that TV show "Waiting for God" with weary souls who have indeed run the race and kept the faith, and are now waiting to be called home. We have these past 8 years put on some good shows, we've raised the banner high and glorified God in this place. We've defied the prophets of gloom who about 6 years ago gave us 6 months to live we've kept the doors open and our heads above water and thanks to your generosity and the skills of David & Sharon we've even been able to pay our way, but is it enough? Could we give more? Is there still time?

I said I don't really care what people think of me. What really matters is what Jesus thinks of me and what people think of my churches. So where would we be in today's parable? I'm quite sure we wouldn't be likened to the Pharisee; self-righteous, looking down his nose at everyone. In all these years I can honestly count the number of Pharisees I've met here on one finger! (that's got you all guessing hasn't it!)

I guess we'd be in His tax collectors category, and that's not a bad place to be. Humble believers, with little faith in our own abilities, placing our reliance to do anything of worth firmly on the Lord. But can we be just a little too humble? When asked to do something, do we sometimes say, "I no, I couldn't possibly do that - I'm too old, I've done my bit, give to someone more able, someone more worthy"

It can be frustrating for the leader of such a church, especially a new leader, who arrives fresh-faced and chomping at the bit to do his bit and lead them on to glory. But then such a leader would be under a misapprehension. It's Jesus who leads us to glory – not the vicar! The vicar's role is to lead his church to Jesus, and Jesus will do the rest. The vicar's role is to help the church to discern God's word, to encourage them never to give up, never to stop studying His word, never to stop praying – and exploring different ways to pray, never stop seeking ways of showing His love to the people around us. Even if – like Paul – they think the end is imminent, it's never too late, you're never too old - YOU CAN ALWAYS DO SOMETHING!!!

You're probably wondering by now, what brought all this on. Well on Wednesday we had a Worship & Mission meeting and it started with the same old same old, with one or two very familiar faces, two very new faces - but very few faces in total. We did have a couple of apologies who contributed ideas by proxy and one who had a senior moment and apologised later for forgetting the meeting completely! And I asked the question I've raised many times before "how can we get more people involved?" And the same old answer came back "They've been there, done that and the tee shirt wore out years ago!" I say it *began* with the same old same old - by the end of Thursday evening I returned home excited. The turn-around in mood began when I read this leaflet. This is from a campaign called "Christmas starts with Christ". It's a national campaign encouraging churches to join together to get the real meaning of Christmas across to them out there. The Church of England, the Evangelical Alliance and the Bible Society, have all come together because they believe Christmas is worth saving.

*Christmas Starts with Christ* is a campaign aimed at helping churches to make *Christ* and the amazing story of his birth the focus of the Christ – Mass. The campaign kicks off on December 1st with the first-ever nationwide *Christmas Starts Sunday*, at the beginning of Advent. There will be posters, radio commercials and other resources available. Please do pick up one of these leaflets when you leave and look up their website.

Despite our low attendance on Thursday we were certainly not short of ideas. Gill is looking into a prayer course from the Diocese which explores even more ways to pray. There are plans for a Christmas social/outreach event in the Borough Arms. There were exciting new ideas to take our Nativity dolls to Martindale Court, nursing homes and pubs as well as schools in the parish for the Posada. We'd also like to go carol singing around the above, so start practicing your scales now! And if you're already thinking "not me" Think again!

Bring out your nativity sets early this year, especially if they are unusual or have a story behind them (apart from THAT story of course), because we're planning a Nativity display week, launched during our Happy Birthday Jesus Party, with an open church for all to come and visit. That means another list folks and PLEASE let's not have all the usual names on it to fill every slot!

All this can begin next Sunday afternoon, with one of our most special outreach services of the year, our "Memories" service is very popular among those who have lost loved ones over past years. I'm looking for helpers to welcome people, I'm looking for people to make tea - maybe even bring some nice cakes - to make them feel even more welcome, even more loved, even more comforted, to make them see that Christ is here in Milton. Please come and see me after this service if you can help. Maybe you know someone who has lost someone special recently, why not bring them along?

In addition to all of the above

We plan to continue with the Holy Week Creative Prayers

The Week of Guided prayer

The Teddy Bears Picnic

The Pet's Service, etc. etc.

And the following year is our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and there'll be lots of things to organise and lots of people to invite and lots of opportunity for outreach. And we will win good fight, We will finish the race, We will keep the faith! You know why many athletes lose out on medals? Because they slow down too early! They think the race is won, and they start easing off. There's none of us getting any younger – that's a fact - but here's another fact Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing we cannot do – with His help.

And we'll attract younger people to come in and take over the baton all the way to the finishing line. We may be weary – but we all can do something, we press on for the prize – what prize?

Let me end by returning to Paul's letter to Timothy. Like I said in the beginning, he knows his death is not far away, but equally - he has no doubt about where he's going...

*"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing".*

From a practical, human point of view, Paul is tired and ready to die. From a spiritual aspect – he has it all panned out before him. At last he will win the crown of righteousness, in contrast to the unrighteous judge who threw him in jail. Paul will stand before the one, right and undisputable judge along with Timothy and all those who have run the race in His name - that's you and me folks - and he will place that laurel wreath on your heads and say "well done, my loyal and faithful servant, with you I am well pleased!"

Amen