

**SERMON for 10 October 2021 – Trinity 19**  
Tom Mumford

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

-

‘Tom is an able student. He shows evidence of his potential, but rarely attempts to do more than the bare minimum required’ – Mrs Rooney, teacher, year 5.

‘Tom is lazy. He has the ability to achieve much more, yet he seems content to do as little as possible to get by. He will be disappointed with his GCSEs if he doesn’t put in more effort’ – Ms Malkinson, English teacher, year 10.

‘Tom attends seminars, and he contributes confidently...however Tom may benefit from doing more than simply turning up and offering his opinions. He seems to forget that the set readings may give him more substance than his regular bluster...’ – Dr Buller, Lecturer in Politics

...Well, you’ll be pleased to know that I have at least read the readings assigned for us today!!

And although I can’t promise it won’t be more of the same bluster, I can promise that my attitude to school and university is very different to that of parish ministry.

(Saying that, in fairness, I suppose *in the end*, my school and university record turned out alright.

Not, younger members of the choir, that I’m condoning a too relaxed attitude to learning... I just want to get that on record before I’m lynched by either the Director of Music or any parents in the congregation.)

-

But on a serious note, how many of us here have done the bare minimum and hoped it was enough?

How many of us here has taken a look at the guidelines or rules, ensured we *at least* keep to *them*, but have been content to just leave it at that?

Well I know I have, my teachers reminded me throughout the years, my fiancée alluded to it while inspecting some of my recent decorating...

...and so I was unsurprised to see similar examples of such evidently *human* behaviour in our readings this morning, most prominent of these being the man who questions Jesus in Mark’s Gospel.

-

In Mark, the rather vaguely named 'man' (perhaps a representation of how all of us can see ourselves in him), seems to fall into the same trap. But luckily, in this case, God in the person of Jesus Christ is there to enlighten him and help offer him new way.

...though not without a bit of Rabbinic humour.

'Good Teacher', the man says. 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'

Jesus, toying with the man, in essence says 'Well, you're a good Jew, you know the law, you know the commandments: do not murder, do not steal, etc etc.

He proceeds to list them, but it seems as if Jesus is almost luring the man into his next response:

'Teacher...all these I have kept since I was a boy'

And then Jesus looks at him, and Mark writes, he '*loved him*'.

-

It feels, meditating on this passage, that the look of love Jesus gives here, is the sort of look of you get as a child from a parent or teacher.

It's that look you get when a child is trying to make a point and, almost inadvertently, you begin to get closer to what it is they're trying to explain.

But the man, as all of us on occasion, is getting there, but he's not quite sure how.

'One thing you lack', Jesus says, 'Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'.

-

What Jesus is trying to get across here is that simply following guidelines or the law, keeping the commandments, essentially doing the bare minimum, falls well short of what God calls us to do and to be.

In this man's case, this falling short is illustrated in the request to give up his wealth. Jesus challenges him in this way because, as we can see by the man's reaction, his wealth is dear to him and he wants to keep it himself.

But if we follow Jesus Christ and we seek relationship with God, we cannot do the bare minimum and keep aside the real goods and treasures for ourselves. We must offer

ourselves and our gifts, may they be vast amounts of wealth or the fruits of our skills, characters and experience.

We are called to offer our potential, to be creative beyond what is comfortable for us, we are called to the *fullness* of life and love.

-

Jesus goes on:

'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'

He *must* have had a twinkle in his eye here!

Now Jesus is not saying that wealth in and of itself is bad (though make no mistake, hoarded for purely selfish reasons it can be), but instead he is using the rich man's situation to demonstrate the importance of offering our *whole selves* in our lives as Christian disciples.

Simply offering the bits of us that we can be bothered to, simply doing the bare minimum, simply following the 'rules' and thinking that's enough...it falls far short of our call.

-

This we know is true in all aspects of our individual and common lives together.

It applies to companies and business.

I was speaking to a former lorry driver the other day who explained that the bare minimum, and often awful conditions, offered by the haulage industry is one of the main reasons we've been queuing for petrol so much lately. No one wants to work in them.

And this principle also applies to our families, our friends, and our domestic lives.

A good parent or carer, for example, does not simply provide the *bare essentials* for their child or for those whom they care.

Although the bare essentials of shelter, food and clothing may be a struggle for us to provide at times, it is not that which makes a good parent or carer.

Neither is it the lifts to school or the pocket money... It is the nurture, the listening to, the teaching, the *love*, that *giving* of oneself to the other.

It can at times be costly, but it is what we are called to do. It is what brings us in step with God.

-

The same can be said of partners, husbands or wives.

Simply doing the chores, running to the shops, or doing the finances, the things that *need* to be done, are not on their own enough.

It's the small things. It's the listening to one another, the showings of affection, it's the going out of one's way to help, to let them know they are appreciated, it's the laughter, it's the letting them know they are *loved*.

-

And the same is true for friendship, and indeed all relationships whether they be at home or at work.

To live up to our calling, to follow Jesus Christ, to walk in step with the living God, we must live into life in *all* its fullness, in *all* its love.

-

Now this may well be daunting...I certainly think so from time to time, but we can take heart that it was the same for the man in Mark whose 'face fell' and 'went away sad'...and even Jesus knew the cost in *his* own ministry...

But, as Jesus says in Mark, no one who follows him will 'fail to receive a hundred times as much' in this age, and in the age to come.

For in following Jesus Christ, in following The Way, The Truth and The Life...there is the *fullness* of life...there is the fullness of *love*.

And with this, *anything* is possible...

My prayer then, as we begin a new era in the life of this great and historic church, is that we will *all* grow in this calling, that we will *all* bring our God given gifts and talents, even wealth, into the mission of this church.

For our call as the civic church of Ipswich is a special call. For we are to love this town, to serve its people, and in doing so, bring the face of God to all who live, work and visit here.

I am so excited to live this out with you.

Amen.