

## **SERMON 9.9.2018**

### **CHRISTOPHER MONTGOMERY**

#### ***Matt. 6:19-24***

I wonder if any of you were in the town centre earlier today? I wonder if you saw Tivoli, or the street market, where lots of people were having a good time and spending lots of money, too. I wonder if you saw expensively dressed people – yes, there are some in Kerava – or expensive new cars, or shop windows and market stalls crammed with goods.

At the same time, try to consider for a moment what you didn't see. The people who cannot afford to go to Tivoli, or buy expensive clothes or new cars, for example. Seeing – using our eyes - is fundamental to our daily experience, and is a major theme in today's Gospel, as well as some of today's hymns.

Today's Gospel passage comes from the Sermon on the Mount, which is arguably the most important passage of Christ's teaching in the whole NT. It made sense for Jesus and his disciples to climb the mountain first, before beginning the sermon: this was such important teaching that it was better to retreat from the human world of farms and villages and cities to a quiet place, where he could teach better and they could listen and learn better. He symbolically also followed in Moses' footsteps: Moses went up Mount Sinai to learn from God about the Law, which he then taught to the Israelites. Christ was doing much the same, a thousand years later, with the difference of course that he *was* God.

But why does Jesus preach about the eyes? And why especially in the middle of a passage about our attitude to riches, or *mammon*? Sight is a common theme in the Bible, especially as seeing can also be equated with understanding, or, in the case of Thomas, with believing. But there is a strong link between what we see and what we do, between seeing and doing good, between seeing and sinning. Seeing something we want but cannot or should not have can arouse dangerous desires, jealousy, frustration, lust, and the temptation to sin can be great. In our materialistic world we are surrounded by attractive temptations, we are constantly reminded of all the things money can buy – not just products in the shops, but experiences, too. Holidays are sold as commercial packages, cultural events have been commercialised and productised ... We are at risk of becoming blinded to what we should be seeing: The visible needs of others. The beauty of God's creation. The wonderful gifts God has given us. And the poor are at risk as much as the rich: a poor person cannot see beyond fulfilling their basic needs for food, clothing, paying the rent. They may forget about – or have no time for – the higher things. What with the daily grind of surviving, with the sense of injustice that in society there are haves and have nots, the poor may find it especially hard to believe in a benevolent God who provides.

We love to give gifts to children. We love to see their face light up when they see the present. It makes both the giver and the receiver happy. It strengthens the bond of love between them.

However, no parent, relative or godparent gives a gift with the intention that the child should become obsessed by it, even to the extent that they forget about the giver. Yet that is exactly what so often happens with us when we enjoy the gifts God has given us. We see the gift and concentrate more on it than on the love the giver has shown towards us. Let us try to appreciate God's gifts to us – both our needs fulfilled and the innocent pleasures of life – for what they really are: manifestation of God's love for us, and let us be grateful for them.

Let us also use our gift of vision wisely: To see those who need our help. To see the problems of this world – injustice, pollution, racism, loneliness – and do our best to solve these problems. To see and admire creation, God's handiwork – in the beauties and wonders of nature, and in each and every fellow human being. Amen.