

## **Proper 23, Trinity 18, Evensong WW**

Joshua 5:13-6:20  
Matthew 11:20-30

The Joshua lesson tells us the well known story about the walls that came tumbling down.

I remember the walls coming tumbling down from Sunday school, and thinking, as a child, yes but so what. You can see I was a bolshie child. And I must be frank with you when I tell you that until preparing for tonight I had never again given that story another thought – for over 40 years. And so I read the lesson and thought, Oh good grief – what is all that about – and then, after reflecting on the lessons for this morning and this evening, it hit me.

And so boys and girls I'm going to tell you what I think it's all about.

This morning's gospel was the story of the rich man who had kept all the rules, but of whom more was required if he was to enter the kingdom of Heaven. And in his case he was required to give up wealth and possessions. This is so often read as condemnation of wealth and possessions, but I don't think that is its primary purpose. It's main message is that we really must give up those things that we hold most dear – things that we are unhealthily dependent on – obsessions, addictions, props from the past that tether us to people or things.

And the same message comes to me in Jesus instructions to turn our backs on our families – not that we fall out with them and never see them again, but that we stop being dependent on them. We have to grow up and be responsible for ourselves.

A rather crude example of ties that bind us is Miss Havisham – grief that she chose to let herself stop growing.

Or the classical picture of the miser who is gnarled and knobby because he refuses to give up his obsession – Mr Burns

Or the witch in Hansel and Gretel who wanted to consume the children rather than let them grow free – how many children suffer emotional abuse in this way from parents who can't let them go?

### **or of course Gollum.**

Such things become barriers around us. We adopt roles to accord with these barriers. We put on masks that hide our true selves. And they become the equivalents of the man's riches that he must give up. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven we have to get rid of these things, to become naked before God.

### **This is liberation – which is salvation, the Christian message. It is spiritual nakedness.**

Now do you see the significance of the walls of Jericho tumbling down? Jericho then becomes naked before the troops of God.

The city is described as being enclosed. Another word is insulated, which almost is isolated. Possessions and attitudes isolate us from God and the world, and insulate us against the outside. It might feel good to be in a castle with all the doors closed, but it is very solipsistic, inturned, the opposite of community, of all of us being part of the mystical body.

And we all know that the more possessions we have, the greater our concern for their safety. We must divest ourselves of all this crap – rubbish.

### **So that is what the Jericho story is all about.**

When we do this, we find ourselves totally dependent on God – we need faith and hope for this. And faith and hope are often in short supply – it is one of the things that I most need to pray for. And when I go to confession as I do a few times a year the lack of faith and trust is one of the things I most need absolution for.

### **And so in Matthew we hear about being utterly dependent on god.**

You will soon be getting the message that I keep banging on about how Christ is present in us all. Like a pilot light. He wants to turn up the dial so that the fire comes full on

**There let it for thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze**

But we keep stopping the dial being turned up

Absolute dependence on God requires that we stop resisting. We let the divine God within fill our skins.

Absolute dependence on God means being like children – or rather, as unlike suspicious adults as it is possible to be. We need to let the scars that surround us, shed the skins of suspicion that have grown up around us as a result of the experiences of the world inherently sinful, or if you prefer, an imperfect world.

**Yoke is easy – yes it is us.** Elsewhere Jesus says it is difficult to do it, but when you have done it you go about with a new spring in your step

**Picking off a scar** – takes a while to get at it, but then it comes off suddenly and it is one of satisfactions of life

Stop resisting Christ within turning up his pilot light.

How

Self examination

Seeing the idols that have sustained you

Hobbies

Books

Exercise

Liturgical practices

But be in no doubt that the Christ within is wanting you to cooperate with him