

Sermon: 18.2.18-Lent 1-2018

“As dying and behold we live; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

Man does of course live by bread alone: we are physical creatures with physical needs....and how we see this in the needs of the world around us, both at home and abroad. Food banks are a local expression of the challenge that is addressed by the great aid agencies overseas. Greed, disaster, unseasonable weather....all contribute to the problem. Man shall not live by bread alone: easy for me to say when I have all I need....and yet: there is surely a difference between being *kept alive* and actually *living*, perhaps we might say not just living but *living in Christ*.

One or two friends of mine are in the process of moving house, or have done so recently. It is a great upheaval and one towards which my family and I are beginning to look ourselves. Not with relish, I might add. What to keep and what to get rid of? Will I need this again? What does it carry for me by way of memories and associations? Will anyone want it when I am gone? Have I used it or opened it since I last moved? Will that box of wheels and chains and gears ever become a motorcycle again....? In today's epistle Paul describes himself and his companions as *“having nothing and yet possessing all things”*. I don't imagine his quote for removals would have come to much: a second tunic, perhaps; maybe that cloak he mentions; a couple of rolled up letters, maybe a cup and a plate.....and yet he *possesses all things*? Not by 21st Century standards he doesn't. In today's Gospel the Lord is offered all the kingdoms of the world by Satan: surely that really would be *possessing all things*? But the Lord knew that he would forsake all things in so doing, namely the only thing that matters.

Being *fully alive* and *possessing all things* is not a bad offer, and it is one that is made to us by God. It is possible to live for a whole long lifetime but never really to be alive; it is possible to be overloaded with belongings and yet....do they ever satisfy?

Lent is the season to consider these matters: they have the headline in the

scriptures today because they have been the besetting preoccupations of us human beings ever since....ever since it all began, long before the Lord was tempted in the wilderness, way back in the Garden of Eden. Can I *possess* that thing which I have been forbidden from taking?

What does it mean to be *fully alive* and to *possess all things*? In part I think it means this: that, with God's help, with habits of Christian living, we peer beyond the immediate and clamouring realities of this world, many of which are the *legitimate concerns* of those of us who live in the world-family, work, children, parents, tax-returns, 'phone contracts....add your own subjects! We peer beyond these, with God's help, to see, to glimpse things as they really are. One day all of these concerns will fade and pass: they have to do so. But we will, in God's love, continue to live in Him and to possess all things.

Lent is a gift from God, a season in which to take stock and to reset the compass. How am I living now? Fully alive or scraping by? And do my concerns and preoccupations with this world, worthy and wholesome as they might be, do they stand between me and God or between me and my neighbour? Lent is the *healing time*, as it says in the office hymn, the time to open our hearts to the salve of God's grace.

But how? The simplest answer is always the most difficult: but it really does have to be in renewing our desire to pray, to attend to God and to allow him to attend to us. I say this first to myself. Lent is a time for returning to the simplest forms of prayer: telling God what we are worried about and asking for his help. Telling him what we have done wrong and asking his forgiveness. Holding before him those in need and asking him to bless them and to help us do likewise. Thanking him for what we receive and asking him to help us to adore him for his own sake. Then, step by step, Paul's words will become ours: *“As dying and behold we live; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”*

