

**A sermon preached at St Andrew's Church Soham on the 10th Sunday after Trinity 2019
by the Revd Eleanor Whalley, Vicar. Hebrews 12: 18-end; Luke 13: 10-17**

May I speak and may we hear in the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

'We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken'.

So we heard in our first reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

I talked last week about the section of the Letter to the Hebrews
that comes just before the passage Mark read to us just now.

We looked at this little cartoon.

For those of you who weren't here last week, we gave Rex some advice
about how he might proceed without incident to the end of the tight rope:

'Fix your eyes on Jesus, Rex'; 'lay aside the weight, and the sin that clings so closely' –
in other words, drop the cat – drop the juggling balls.

Rex - remember the cloud of witnesses – God's faithful people who have gone before us -
all God's saints – all rooting for you.

Fix your eyes on the goal, Rex – don't look down.

So last week, it was about the journey.

This week, it's about the destination.

It's about the platform Rex is approaching.

'You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the Living God... You have come to Jesus, the mediator of a new
covenant – we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken'.

What awaits Rex on that platform –

the reality we are offered for all eternity;

the reality we touch today

in the mystery of Holy Communion –

that reality will never be taken away – it will never change – it cannot be shaken.

Nothing in this life or the next life can affect it.

I'm reminded of that line in Abide with Me:

'Change and decay in all around I see. O Thou who changest not, abide with me'.

How many people in this world today need to be assured of God's changelessness – God's reliability –

God's ever-present stillness in the eye of the storm?

Maybe we need to be assured of that ourselves.

About ten days ago, when we had those very high winds,
I cycled up to church to count the pinnacles on the tower.
I was relieved to find they were all still in place.

God's kingdom cannot be shaken,

but the kingdoms of this world surely can be.

Positively, think of the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Negatively, think of Syria; think of the Amazon rainforest.

On a literally parochial scale –

and there's nothing like that bigger picture to put this into perspective -

I wanted to let you know this morning the estimated cost figures
of our proposed restoration works.

A quantity surveyor came here a few weeks ago to work out how much the project will cost.

He came up with a figure of close to £2M.

Fees and community activity costs will take us a good way beyond £2M.

I'm telling you that in the context of a sermon

rather than just in the notices

because I think it is essential

that we see this challenge through the eyes of faith.

The problems our building faces

need not be a distraction from mission –

they could be an opportunity for mission. They have to be an opportunity for mission.

They could open up possibilities for us –

they could lead us along ways – perhaps along tightropes – we might not otherwise have walked along;

they could lead us ever deeper in the way of Jesus Christ.

It's helped me this last fortnight

to think about Rex.

It's helped me to remember the words of the Letter to the Hebrews.

Those words are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago:

'Consider Jesus... so that you may not grow weary, or lose heart'

'Consider Jesus'. That's good advice. It encourages me, and I hope it encourages you too.

If we jump to today's Gospel reading,
there's more advice and encouragement there –
at least, it seems to me that there is.

Jesus calls the woman he's healed a 'daughter of Abraham'.

He'll use a similar phrase

just a few chapters later

when he calls Zacchaeus down from the tree.

Zacchaeus, like the woman, is perceived to be an outsider.

The synagogue leaders, the observant Jews in the crowd
think of themselves as the sons and daughters of Abraham.

They are the in-crowd.

They are the ones who keep the rules.

But these observant Jews need telling

that a tax collector and a woman –

a sick woman, at that – a woman who was considered in that culture to have been 'bound by satan' -

that tax collector and that woman

have as much right to become citizens of God's kingdom as they do.

Zacchaeus is 'a son of Abraham' – that's what Jesus calls him; the woman is 'a daughter of Abraham'.

Entry to God's kingdom is possible for everyone.

I would never have chosen

to be where we are with this building –

I'm sure that's true for all of us.

And yet being where we are

has already brought perhaps unexpected rewards.

You were handed new calendars when you came in this morning –

those calendars will be paid for

out of our current heritage lottery fund grant.

We can use the grant to pay for them because they advertise not only church services

but also events for our wider community –

events like this year's Christmas Market, part of this town's Winter Fair.

The same heritage grant paid for our Wild Weekend back in May –
as with the fair, hundreds of people
came to our church and churchyard –
including many of you.

If we weren't where we were with our building,
we wouldn't have Claire – our heritage project co-ordinator. Claire is with us this morning.

We probably wouldn't have a heritage project to co-ordinate.

And if our next Heritage Lottery Fund bid is to be successful, that project will need to get much bigger.

That's what we're working on now.

Because of our heritage project, our involvement with our schools has mushroomed.

Children have come to church who'd never been here before –

they've come not just for RE or for church services –

although many have come for those, of course –

they've come for maths, they've come for design and technology,

they've come for history – they'll soon, we hope, be coming for music.

Without exception, at least as far as I'm aware,

those children have had a wonderful time – they've had a positive experience.

And when they've come, adults have come too –

parents, grand-parents and school staff - many of whom had never been here before.

'Daughters of Abraham' – 'Sons of Abraham':

members of the new Israel Christ came to establish, even if they don't yet know it.

I hope that in coming here they get a glimpse of God's kingdom -

through what they see, through what they hear,

through the welcome they receive in this place.

And as well as through the people, through the witness of these stones -

stones which have stood firm for so long:

pointers to that kingdom

which cannot be shaken;

that kingdom where Jesus

waits to welcome us and to hail us as his own. May it be so. Amen.