

St Stephen's, Canonbury
Lent 2016: Challenged to Change
Lent Reflection and Study Material

Lent 5: Gold refined in the fire

Readings: Revelation 3:14-22 and Mark 11:1-11

Revelation 3:14-22

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Mark 11:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no-one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Questions:

Begin by reading the passages. Is there anything that you find particularly meaningful or puzzling or challenging? Share any verses together or hold the words in prayer. Ask that God will help your understanding.

Laodicea is a comfortable and wealthy place. The thing the Christians there are condemned for is confusing material wealth for spiritual treasure. How does this challenge us today? It is easy to feel blessed when we get home, sit on the sofa, turn the heating up and cook a nice meal. Could you feel blessed if all this was taken away from you?

How do you see your spiritual life as a Christian and your life in the material world fitting together? What does Matthew 6:19-21 & 25-34 tell us? We often pray that God will meet our material needs and the needs of others. Is this the right thing to do?

There have always been people who try to live outside of the demands of the material world. From the 'Desert Fathers' who lived in isolation in desert caves for 30 or more years to those who give up everything and live in religious communities today. For most of us these experiences are just short fragments if we find time to go on retreat. Have you had experiences on retreat or at other times when you feel you have been able to leave the demands of the world behind for a while. Share something about them if you can.

What about us as a church? Are we shaped by our material needs? Do we let the material world place limitations on what we expect our almighty God to do amongst us? Are we in anyway like the Laodiceans – thinking God is blessing us when in fact we are focussing on the wrong things?

Jesus says: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' How can we make space to hear Jesus knocking today? Do you open the door each day and welcome Jesus in?

Prayer

Lord,
show us where we are lukewarm.
Show us where we have lost sight of what is true.
Show us where we have replaced your pure gold with the rubbish of the world,
and change us,
in Jesus name. Amen

Family friendly version

It is important that we work out what the really important things are in life. Otherwise we can spend lots of time looking for things and trying to do things that don't really matter. What do you think are the 2 most important things in your life?

In the reading from Revelation we heard about people who had grown really proud of all the wealth and things that they have. It is really easy for us to want the latest gadgets and toys or for adults to want bigger houses and faster cars. What do you think God thinks about this?

Jesus says to them: 'Don't think your possessions are important, in the end they are all worthless. Come to me and buy 'Gold refined in the fire' instead. I wonder what you think Jesus' 'gold' really is? How can it be bought?

Well the answer is that Jesus' 'gold' is his love and we can't really buy it apart from maybe giving Jesus our love.

The people the letter in Revelation is written to are told that the most important thing we can do is to open the door to Jesus. To welcome him into our lives and let him show us how to live. How do you think we should do this?

Prayer

Lord,
Help me to keep my eyes fixed on you,
Help me to open the door to you every day,
Help me to want your 'gold' in my life and not the things of the world. Amen