

Seize the Moment

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Date: 27 October 2024

Preacher: The Rt. Rev. Mike Hill

[0 : 01] As we sit, let's pray together. Our gracious Father, we thank you for your word. And we pray that this morning you would open our ears and our hearts and our minds.

Father, that you will do amongst us what you promise you will do. And that is you'll change us from the inside out. That we might truly be your disciples and may shine in this dark world.

To the glory of your name. Amen. So the topic I've been given this morning to talk to you about is seize the day.

It's a phrase, a little more about that in a minute, but it's a phrase that has been used a lot in leadership seminars. I often think when the speakers of the opinion that the people in front of him are about to slip into a coma, suddenly shout at them, seize the day.

Or again, in our current world, it sits very well with this kind of idea of well-being. Where you'll have heard oft-quoted the phrase, live in the moment.

[1 : 18] As if we could somehow easily ditch our past, many of you are prisoners of that past, as a matter of fact. Or we could pretend that the future doesn't exist at all.

And there's a little whiff of what the Greek poet and philosopher, with the unlikely name of Horace, who wrote this set of four books called his Odes.

And it's in book one and poem number 11, that he talks about seizing the day. You get a little bit of that, don't you, in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus is talking, he says, take no thought for tomorrow.

Tomorrow will take care of itself. Well, of course, what Jesus was dealing with there was something that can be very crippling in our lives. And that is, he was dealing with anxiety.

He's saying to the crowd there, look, when you look at the birds of the air, they don't worry about what they're going to wear. I'm not going to put your hands up, but I wonder if there's anybody in the house who has started an evening out with that question, I don't know what to wear.

[2 : 41] So you go to a wardrobe which is copiously full, and then you announce, and I haven't got anything to wear. Jesus said, you don't need to be anxious about that.

He's trying to deal with anxiety. And there's nowhere in the Bible where you would be encouraged not to think about your future. Remember in Romans, the letter to the Romans, chapter 8.

Paul is dealing with a congregation who are really dispirited. They're being persecuted.

They're being harassed. And the Roman authorities were like this. As long as you lived by their rules, they were fine. But the moment you crossed those rules, the full weight of the power of the Roman Empire would fall upon you.

And you might even find yourself crucified upside down on the Appian Way. This is not a fun time to be a Christian.

[3 : 49] And do you know what? I don't think it's a fun time to be a Christian today. Talk a little more about that in a moment. But for now, back to Horace. Horace wrote his poems.

The poem that he wrote, poem number 11 in book 1, goes like this. He's arguing against endless speculation about the future.

He says, It's been a scholarly debate, as there normally is around the classics.

What did Horace actually mean? Did he really mean that we seriously shouldn't give any thought at all for tomorrow? Well, that's one scholarly view.

And of course, that's the way it's interpreted in our culture today. It's interpreted very much as, go out there and get them. Or even worse, it's used as a kind of ticket to a hedonistic lifestyle.

[5 : 15] Hedonism is a philosophy of pleasure. A lot of writers are writing about the fact that the Judeo-Christian culture that formed our own culture has been pushed to the margins of society.

And in consequence today, people seem to have no meaning apart from what we read off from their lives. And that is, they want to get as much money as possible and have a good time.

Incidentally, just in case you're confused about this, Christians aren't against a good time. It's interesting that before I became a Christian, that's exactly what I thought they were about.

When I became a Christian, I realized that some aspects of my lifestyle needed to be curtailed in order that I could live as Jesus wanted me to live. And that's a great act of faith on my part and on your part, because living as Jesus wants us to live is very often against the way we would naturally live.

Blessed are the meek, said Jesus when giving us the Beatitudes. You tell me in the city of London where the meek are blessed. They're mostly giving a P45 and told to be, we'll see you later.

[6 : 30] But there's another interpretation of Horace, and it's this. When you seize today, seize it in the light of tomorrow.

That is, whatever you decide to do today, think about the ramifications in the future. Never forgotten this heart-rending personal story on some documentary on one of the Netflix or one of those.

And this guy is 27 years old and he's nearly dead. And he's sobbing in front of the camera saying, if only.

20, 17 years ago, when somebody said, I've got something that will cheer you up, a street dealer. And he took it.

And it was the beginning of what became the end. Three months after this documentary, he died. Think about the decisions you make today in the light of what outcomes they might have for you tomorrow.

[7 : 58] That seems a very reasonable thing to think. Yet so many people don't. I want to say to you, I think that the problem in the Western church is so many of us who warn the people, well, we don't have pews here, we're business class, right?

People who warn the pews of churches in the Western church, in terms of their walk with God, in terms of their discipleship, are cases of what I would call arrested development.

And I want to turn to our Bible story now and show you that in this strange story about blind Bartimaeus and his meeting with Jesus, there are four things we really need to think about unless we're happy to remain as cases of arrested development.

Let me tell you what those four things are. One is, we learn from this story that we can easily be distracted. Distracted from what God wants in our lives.

two, this story teaches us, don't be intimidated. Don't be intimidated by the background noise of our culture.

[9 : 17] Thirdly, it teaches us don't lack in faith. Believe it, when Jesus said, with God, all things are possible. And don't be mutable.

That means, don't think that you cannot change. Some of you are sitting there saying, well, hang on, I'm older than you, mate. I'm too old to change. Look, the Bible teaches us you're never too old to change.

Think about Abraham. He had to give up his middle class lifestyle at the age of 90 and go on a scary journey and nobody at that point had told him where he was going. With God, all things are possible.

Anybody in the house believe that? Someone say amen. Amen. So here we are and this man is seated by the roadside on the road to Jericho.

Jericho. Jericho is nearly 40 kilometers away from Jerusalem. Those of you who have visited the Holy Land and very lightly travel along what's, you know, now a modern motorway to Jericho.

[10 : 36] Back then, it was just a track and he's sitting there and he's blind. And there's no public services. There's no companies running with an idea of inclusion and including disabled people in that.

It didn't exist then. He had a wretched life. Some of you are sitting there saying, me too. May not be blindness, it may be other stuff, may be bereavement, broken relationship, whatever.

Illness. And he shouts out. Says he hears that Jesus is coming. I don't quite know what that means. But he hears Jesus is coming and he shouts out. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And here you go.

What do we read in the text? Christ. Many rebuked him and told him to put a sock in it. I mean, my words, not the Bible's. Be quiet.

[11 : 49] But he persists. And Jesus stops. You know, I read those two words in the Bible and here's this man who's had this wretched life, no hope, no public services, very little money apart from what he can beg.

Jesus stopped. And Jesus needs to stop and let you know that he's looking at you with compassion. And that his heart is not set against you. He is not happy if you're the kind of person, who feels, well, I've been dealt a, you know, duff set of marbles in this life.

He stops. And he wants to help. And this man shows his faith because he's persistent.

You know, it would have been easy for this poor, blind man to be distracted by the noise of the crowd. Like many of you are.

[13 : 10] The background noise of our culture today is very loud. Let me tell you a statistic which I think will shock you and if it doesn't, we'll get the defibrillator out. young people between the ages of nine and 14 spend nine hours a day in front of a screen.

Now, some of that will be learning time in school, I get that, but a lot of it will be on smartphones, a lot of it will be on television watching so much of the utterly horrible stuff that's served up these days.

You think that's not distracting, particularly on a developing brain. Frankly, the outcomes for tomorrow of that kind of behaviour are potentially horrendous.

And what distracts you? what are you, are you, are you sitting there thinking about God or are you sitting there thinking about, I wonder who's been in touch with me on social media?

Are you sitting there thinking to yourself, I forgot to put the potatoes in. I'm not saying those are completely wrong questions, but they're distracting.

[14 : 50] And we are a distracted culture. Paul said in Romans chapter 12, he said, don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

We better start working out, how the heck are we going to do this? Because the background noise is overwhelming, just like it could have been for blind Bartimaeus.

But he kept going, avoided the distraction, and Jesus stopped.

Second thing is, it tells us that Bartimaeus, a man who would be considered of very little worth in his society, nobody, no barrister is going to represent him and represent his human rights, because truthfully, he didn't have any.

It would have been easily for this worthless man, and as we know today, sadly, some people of disability get horrible things said to them.

[16 : 07] It would have been easy, wouldn't it, to be intimidated by the rebuke. And friends, I need to tell you that I think today a lot of us who own the name of Jesus are comfortable when we're sitting here singing, you know, worshipping God together.

We're comfortable when we're amongst our Christian friends. We're comfortable when we're doing God stuff. Maybe a bit too comfortable when we're doing definitely God stuff, not God stuff.

but I think a lot of us, when we go out through the doors of this church, feel a little intimidated about owning the name of Jesus in our culture.

There is evidence to suggest that you would have good reason for being intimidated. a lot of you are maybe working for companies who have policy statements that as a Christian, you're not comfortable with.

There's an organization that represents Christians who feel that they've been persecuted, intimidated in their faith. I don't want to call what happens to Christians in our country persecution because it doesn't compare well, does it, with the people who be losing their lives today simply for owning the name of Christ.

[17 : 43] Intimidation, I'll allow. A lot of people are intimidated by that. Not just the thing of, you know, I don't want to be thought of as a religious fanatic.

It is the thing that in certain organizations, particularly some of the bigger tech companies, if you're not prepared to sign up to things that you're uncomfortable with, you will lose your job. Companies over here, it is true to say, if you don't sign up to that stuff, the likelihood is you will not get promotion within the organization.

Is it fair? Hate crime in the last two years since lockdown has gone up by a third. That is hate crime towards people of faith.

death. Now, I think, and you need to hear this, I think this is a problem that can be seriously overstated, and sometimes is, but I also think it's a reality that can be understated in the church.

Friends, when are we going to wake up and get the coffee on? I was expecting when I asked that question, some smart aleck would say, after you finish at the back, look, we've got to get beyond this.

[19 : 01] We've got to get beyond distraction, we've got to get beyond intimidation. What's the third thing this story teaches us? Don't be lacking in faith. This guy didn't recite the creed before Jesus healed him.

Jesus had no idea where he was, except that Jesus picked up this. This man thinks I can heal him. what does he say to him? Your faith, your faith has healed you.

A lot of people in the church, some of you suffering from sickness. Some of you are reaching the senior years of your life when what used to work okay doesn't work quite as well.

God. And friends, I'm not standing here to tell you, trust Jesus and you be healed immediately, though I do believe that Jesus could heal.

And maybe there's something wrong in our lives or something wrong in us that might get in the way of that. But what I am saying to you is that if the worst thing that happened in your life, i.e.

[20 : 20] the old enemy got you and you died, your faith in Jesus means, it means that death will not be a brick wall for you.

that you will enter into a new quality of life, almost unimaginable to us. And faith will reveal that to you.

We all sit in churches, don't we, hoping that we might see a lot more mighty works of God. I share that. I want to see it. I can't explain why that's not happening.

But I think a healthy Christian would want to see some more of that, wouldn't we? We'd want to see people healed of their sickness. Don't be distracted, don't be intimidated, don't be lacking in faith.

We've been told a little earlier in Mark's gospel when Jesus calmed the storm and the disciples were terrified. Jesus says he rebuked them for their lack of faith.

[21 : 38] I often think if Jesus metaphorically stopped by me, would he rebuke me for my lack of faith? Yeah, on the other hand, the Bible says, just to reassure you, you need faith the size of a mustard seed to shift mountains.

God's faith to be good. God's faith to be good. God's faith to be good. God's faith to be good. We don't know what kind of faith Bartimaeus had, but we know it got him healed of his terrible affliction. transformation. And finally, don't imagine yourself to not being capable of transformation. I think it's going to be a hard road for some of you.

It's been for me, and I still should carry an L plate on my back. I wonder if Bartimaeus, before he met Jesus, before Jesus stopped in front of him, thought to himself, this is it, I'm going to see again. I don't know. Maybe if I bump into Bartimaeus in heaven, I'll ask him. I do know this.

[22 : 55] I do know that the moment we decide we are unchangeable is the moment we declare ourselves to be cases of arrested development.

I'm pretty sure if I had to stick your hand up, if you want to be a case of arrested development, I don't think there would be many hands up in church. But there might be some of you.

who know yourself to be a case of arrested development, and are comfortable with that. Maybe today, God is going to whisper in your ears.

These four things, don't be distracted, don't be intimidated, don't be lacking in faith, and don't think yourself to be unchangeable. These are serious things that can undermine our faith.

There are other things too, but I don't have time for that. Do you ever hear yourself saying, I'm only human, give me a break. I'm happy where I am, leave me alone.

[24 : 09] I'm not even sure whether God loves me, whether he's ever going to stop by my life. I don't want anybody to think I'm a bit too devoted.

I don't want people to mistake me as a member of a cult. Let me tell you the bad news and the good news to end. Whatever God needs to do in your life, you cannot do in your own strength. strength. Let me say that again. Whatever God needs to do in your life, you cannot, cannot do in your own strength.

You can only do it when you invite God in the power of his Holy Spirit from deep inside of you, if you're a believer. to start to do his work of making you more like him.

It's what theologians call sanctification. Making us fit for God's kingdom. kingdom. I wonder if any of you are prepared to do anything about that today.

[25 : 27] I think at the end there are going to be some prayer teams either side at the front here and I would love it, but even more significantly, God would love it if you recognize that you need to go and get somebody to pray with you for something that's just not working in your life.

Come on, those of you who are intimidated. Come on, those of you who are distracted. Come on, those of you who think you're too old to change or I can never change.

My habits run too deep in my life. Come to me. Come to me. If you're the kind of person who's lacking in faith and seek a deeper gift, you notice that Jesus said to this man, what do you want me to do for you?

And I'm surprised that his disciples didn't just go, duh. It's pretty obvious. There's a blind man begging Jesus. Jesus, why did Jesus say that?

There's a psychological phenomenon. And it's this, that if we've lived a wretched life and been for so long in the pit, the pit becomes security for us and we resist attempts to help us out of the pit, not least because if we're being pulled out of the pit and somehow we fall back in, it feels a lot worse than we were before we started.

[27 : 10] Explains why it is that those of you who've got addictive illnesses find it so difficult. Your security's lying in the pit. Maybe today.

God's saying, I'll give you a hand. I've stopped. Friends, this is a great passage and God forgive me if I've not done justice to it.

But this stuff is so important. And I need to stop because you look like you need lunch. Come on.

Come on. In this world, we in the Western Church have got to step it up. It's too important for us just to kind of half-heartedly limp along.

You know that the Church of England, it won't surprise you, the Church of England in the last two years has lost nearly 200,000 members. That's 20% of who we were.

[28 : 16] Nobody is going to be impressed by distracted, intimidated Christians. Come on. Let's seize the day.

Carpe diem. And go out there and do God's work in God's way. In the name of our amazing God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the people who agreed, said together, Amen.