Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15; **Hebrews 4: 12-end**; **Mark 10: 17-31**

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

I don’t know how many of you followed the preparations for the so-called Royal wedding which took place on Friday. I have to say I didn’t; I have high regard for the Queen and Prince Philip and the service they have contributed to the country over so many years, but I have very little interest in all the myriad minor royals who don’t ‘do’ anything.

However, having said I wasn’t following the wedding preparations, I was incensed by the news earlier in the week that the homeless people who live on the streets of Windsor had been told to clear away their possessions or have them taken away to a police lock-up somewhere. Presumably so that the rich people attending the wedding – and the sight-seers – didn’t have to look at them and know that there are people in this country who have nothing and sleep in shop doorways.

Wealth, as we all know deep down, doesn’t necessarily bring happiness. And the rich young man in today’s gospel reading was recognising this too. With all he had by way of material possessions, there was a little bit of him that understood that he was missing something. An emptiness. And so he approached Jesus to ask for help. What does he need to do in order to inherit eternal life? And that ‘inherit’ is an interesting word. There are things about inheritance that need unpicking.

First, an inheritance exists, now, in the present. If I were to be in line to receive an inheritance, that would presume that it already exists somewhere. However, it does not, yet, belong to me – it belongs for now to a distant maiden aunt, or whatever.

Second, it has been secured, brought into existence, by someone else – I have done nothing to build up its assets or grow its value – someone else, maybe quite a long way in the past, has done all that hard work.

Third, the gift of that inheritance is in someone else’s control – it can be given or taken away.

And finally, while it exists in the present, it is for me a future occurrence. That which is to be inherited is not yet mine.

And maybe there is a sense in which the rich young man understands all this, certainly at an earthly level; but at the same time, he wants to guarantee this inheritance of eternal life for himself; to fix it into his present rather than his future. He has already developed an attachment to it, in the same way as he has an attachment to his earthly wealth. What he is missing completely of course, is that this whole inheritance thing is out of the control of the person who is in line to inherit. See above. It currently belongs to someone else; it is not the fruit of the inheritor’s labours; it is a potential gift which will be given at some stage in the future.

The young man, who is rich and a ruler and therefore perhaps feels some sense of entitlement to all the good things not only of life but of death, thinks he can do things which will earn him eternal life.

So when Jesus starts by probing him about his knowledge of the law, he replies promptly: Master, I’ve kept all these commandments since I was little.

But here’s a thing: did anyone notice the commandments Jesus quoted to the young man? They started with commandments 6-9: murder, adultery, theft and perjury, then back to 5: honouring one’s parents, but completely omitted some others – of which more in a moment.

At which point, Jesus, we are told in Mark’s account, looking at him, loved him. That’s the ‘Oh Bless’ moment. Here’s this earnest young man saying: yes, Lord, I haven’t killed anyone, and I haven’t run off with someone else’s wife and I haven’t stolen anything, so you can’t fault the way I live my life. And he was indeed, it seems, a good Jew; being a good Jew entailed following a lot of rules. But what Jesus’ followers were beginning to learn was that the coming of Jesus had changed everything – life was no longer about living according to the rules; it was much more radical than that. So now Jesus highlights the really hard bits – see now those commandments he missed out: 1-4, the stuff about putting God first, not having idols, keeping the Sabbath and then also number 10, which is the one about covetousness.

The young man was about to struggle hugely with putting God first and with letting go of worldly possessions… And Jesus wants the young man to understand that like any other inheritance, he can’t do anything to guarantee it. So he tells him: Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And the young man just sort of wanders sadly away. That was an ask too far. Because he was very rich.

It certainly looks, on the face of it, simple enough. But at the same time, it really isn’t as straightforward as it looks: what **is** actually easier? To keep all the commandments? Or to sell your possessions? Keeping all the commandments all the time is a call to perfection and nothing short of perfection will do. Whereas selling your possessions is a one-off act; there’s some relief in that, surely: done; finished; sorted.

However, of course, even that is not as easy as it might seem. Jesus’ real point is perhaps that neither thing is truly possible – not keeping all the commandments, nor selling everything and giving to the poor. When all is said and done, there is nothing we can do in order to get the inheritance of eternal life. And this is the point at which the disciples come in, looking distinctly worried: So who, then, can be saved? And Jesus says (looking hard at them): with human beings, it is impossible, but with God, nothing is impossible.

But here’s the paradox: we are still called to those things that Jesus said were impossible: we are called to keep the commandments, not in order to receive the inheritance, but because it is already promised to us. That inheritance that we can be sure we will receive, by God’s grace, actually frees us to keep God’s commandments.

Because we don’t have to worry about how to get there, we are freed up to serve God and each other, and to share the inheritance with others. The kingdom of heaven, remember, is not sometime in the indefinite future, but is at hand. And real heavenly treasure is those homeless men and women in Windsor going somewhere else, not because they make the place look untidy, but because they have somewhere else to go.

And just as I close: the words of the letter to the Hebrews which we also heard this morning seem particularly relevant to the rich young man and probably to us: the living word of God is sharp and incisive, judging the thoughts and intentions of our hearts and sympathising with our weaknesses. Jesus didn’t dismiss the young man as useless; Jesus, looking at him, loved him and Jesus, looking at us, loves us.

And so we come in faith and hope to the altar of God, not only to receive mercy but to find the grace to give up those things which bind us to our earthly wealth and to truly become the people God is calling us to be.

**Amen**