

Second Sunday before Lent, 2026 (February 8th)

Romans 8:18-25; Matthew 6.25 – end

Consider the birds of the air. They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

I find this a truly challenging Gospel reading.

I use the word ‘challenging’ in two senses. First of all, as a polite way of saying frankly, incredible. And then also, challenging in the sense of making me, us, ask some serious questions about our lives.

First, the incredible. On the face of it, this Gospel appears to suggest that you simply shouldn’t worry about the future, especially not your material future. Don’t bother planning for the future. Don’t bother working hard. Don’t save. Don’t worry about your pension. Don’t worry about anything. Be like a bird, be like a flower. God will look after everything. If you put God first, all these other things – money, food, clothes – they’ll be OK. He’ll look after you. Don’t worry.

Well, I think if you base your life on that teaching, you’re a fool. More than a fool, in fact – you’ll be letting down those who should be able depend on you, and you’ll be frankly making yourself a burden to everyone else. They’re the ones who will have to bail you out, and make sure you don’t starve. I would say – and incidentally other texts in the Bible also say – you’ve actually got a responsibility to yourself and the world around you, if you can, to work hard and plan and look after yourself and your neighbour. Of course, some people can’t – but for most of us, the Lord is not going to provide, without you doing something about it. St. Paul is pretty blunt on the subject: ‘if you won’t work, don’t expect to eat.’ (2 Thess.3:10)

Which leaves me with the big problem, of course: was Jesus in this Gospel simply wrong? Is he some mad, unrealistic, hopelessly naïve hippy type figure, whose advice dissolves on first contact with reality?

Unsurprisingly, no.

But then, how on earth do understand what he says?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith. Do not worry. It’s the Gentiles who strive for all these things – food, drink, clothes. And indeed your heavenly Father knows you need them. Strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things will be given to you as well.

The only way I can make sense of it is this.

Human beings, quite rightly, do worry about where the next meal is coming from. About how to keep warm, about the future. To not worry, to not prepare is, as I've said, just foolishness.

However, it is very, very difficult, in fact it is almost impossible, to keep that natural and proper worry, that need to prepare, from tipping over into something else. From becoming much bigger, much stronger, much more all consuming than it should be. From making it, in fact, the driving force of our lives, the thing we fixate and obsess on. I've got to get, I've got to have, I've got to accumulate, I've got to impress.

It's usually wealth, or power, or status, or success, or ego, or some combination of all of them, but life so easily becomes 'I've got to have it'. That's what my life is *about*.

Sometimes it's really obvious – we can all look at people in the news, say, and it's easy to see what they've made their lives about: money, sex, power.

It's more tricky to see it in ourselves, but it's almost always there. That things which drives us. The need to impress, say. Or the need for applause. There'll be *something* there, something in the driving seat, even if it's well disguised. And it will shape your whole life. It determines everything we do, and a lot of the time we don't even know it. We haven't really thought about it, we just live it.

And Jesus is essentially saying, wake up. Look at what's in your driving seat. The usual suspects are wealth, power and status. And you were made for way, way more than those things. They're not what you're here for. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? You are a beloved child of God. The reason you exist is to share his life. You are destined for glory and beauty and splendour far beyond what even Solomon, in all his glory, could imagine – far beyond the greatest of all Kings. As our reading from Romans 8 put it, you are headed into the glorious liberty of the children of God. You cannot begin to comprehend the joy, the wonder, the richness that awaits you.

That's what you're actually aimed at. That's the true destination. All this other stuff: material security, social success, power, strength, impressiveness ... it's not necessarily bad, at least not all of it, it's just kind of ... small. It's beneath you. You're a son or daughter of God. How have you got bogged down in all these little things? Set your heart on God, set your aim there. Make union with Him the be-all and end-all and these other things ... well, it's not so much that they'll fall into place. More like, they will know their place. Their very secondary place.

There's a reason why we have this Gospel ten days before Lent. This is what Lent is all about: refocussing. Getting your heart in the right place, your life pointed in the right direction. You need to be thinking now about what do. What little step you'll take away from your fixations, what little gestures that show you know your life is not about possessions, or security, or power. What little steps you'll take towards your true life, towards God and his Kingdom. Ten days to think. Seize them. It's what you're on this earth to do.