

## Sermon – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 – 8 am

Some months ago I made the decision to rent out the house that I own. In many ways the choice was made for me. It turns out that leaving a house empty for long periods of time isn't particularly good for it. And with the rising cost of fuel bills, I simply couldn't afford the monthly expenditure. The thing is, though, especially in the current climate where properties for rental are at a premium, there were plenty of Estate Agents willing to help me. To me, the decision was a daunting one, and felt as though it would require significant effort, not least because the house was definitely in need of a little TLC. Nevertheless, the lovely Lauren came and reassured me that it was highly rentable, and could achieve a good income. I didn't need to worry. They would help me through the whole process. It would all be very easy indeed.

In reality, of course, things never quite turn out as we anticipate. The expenditure required to get the house to a standard for rental meant that at least 3 months' income was absorbed before I had even received it. A glitch when one tenant pulled out meant that I had an energy company sending threatening letters about money that I didn't even owe. And once the tenants had moved in, it felt like one complaint after another for several months. I still dread the number of the Estate Agent coming up on my phone, because I know that the cheery "how are you?" will be followed by the latest problem.

As I think about the Estate Agents who manage my property rental, I realise how grateful I would be if, instead of offering boundless optimism and confidence that everything would be fine and there was nothing to worry about, they had simply been honest. Not offered dire predictions or a sense of impossibility. But an honest assessment of both the outlay and what I might be faced with. Because now, as soon as I hear the cheery voices telling me that there's nothing to worry about, I simply don't believe it.

Trust is the most precious commodity. It is something that is increasingly hard to win. It is also something that is incredibly easily lost. Scanning across various aspects of public life, it is easy to see how little trust there actually is – often with good reason. Think about the political sphere. Manifestos are a strange combination of wish lists and someone's best guess at what promises will win an election. They bear very little resemblance to what any political party intends to achieve during their time in office. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse has exposed shortcomings in countless institutions, including the church. And newspaper headlines lead us to ask whether an organisation like the BBC can be trusted, either. It can feel like a very depressing picture indeed.

And so the question we are left with is where do we find trust? It is perhaps inevitable that we find it difficult to trust something as unwieldy as an institution because that's not really how trust works. Trust is often founded on relationship. Think for a moment about those individuals and groups of people that you trust the most. We all surely have them. What is it that helps to build trust? And what breaks it down?

Sometimes it can help to think about the people we would go to in various eventualities. Who is it that you would trust with a piece of information that you don't want shared wider? Who is it that you would trust to give you thoughtful advice? Who is it that you would trust to simply listen and be there for you? Who is it that you would trust to offer practical assistance?

It's also worth thinking about whether there is anyone who would fall into all of those categories.

In many ways this morning's gospel reading is about trust. When the chief priests and elders question Jesus, they are not doing so because they want an answer to their question. They are trying to trip him up. Which is why, when Jesus doesn't respond as they expect, they are wrongfooted themselves.

Do you notice how they find themselves reasoning when asked a simple question by Jesus? There is no interest in what they actually believe the answer to be. Rather, they are keen to consider the repercussions of whichever answer they give.

The parable that Jesus tells is an interesting counterpoint. Neither son actually gives an honest answer when asked to go and work in the vineyard. And yet these are both the man's sons. It's highly likely that he knows them well enough to know what each will actually do. Trust, or lack of it, will be built on relationships. On knowing one another well. And trust is also built on what we actually do, not how good a story we can tell.

At a time when there is less trust in public life than ever, it is surely worth nurturing those relationships where we find real trust. And making a commitment to be trustworthy ourselves, in what we say, and what we do.

Amen