

17.08.2025

Hebrews 11.29 – 12.2

Luke 12.49–56

Well, here we are. After about 130 sermons, 140 eucharists, and an unknown number of bad jokes, this is my final Sunday... at least for now!

It's been a crazy two years, and honestly, it's been tough! You know, not long ago, I used to have people sometimes say I looked a lot younger than I am. Sadly, those days seem to have gone, no one has said that for quite some time. I think the past two years have taken a toll on me!

With 2 jobs, learning to live in another country, finding out how to pay bills, pay rent, get insurance, navigate the transport system, and then begin a whole journey into the Swiss healthcare system, culminating with baby Hazel – and all of that in French – I think I've lived more in the past 2 years than the previous 10!

But first and foremost, a huge thank you from myself and from Angela – and from Hazel – for your toleration and kindness. It has been a pleasure getting to know you and I only wish I had had more time to spend with you pastorally.

The list of names I need to thank is huge – Daphne, obviously (!); Ursula; Mary; the Guntons; Mark and Ana Victoria; Gill; the Laravaires; Ludo; Jackie, the Banzets, the Creffields, Michele (who has done so much), Susan & John; Beryl & Brian; Linda & Beat; Simone & Nick; Margaret; Christine; Liz; Armel; Noreen; Sam; Muriel; Paul & Susan; Ben; Armored; Mike French; Manel; Humberto ... I could go on and on, this list is not exhaustive and please do not feel left out if I have not mentioned you!

We've experienced some immense acts of kindness and generosity, especially when Hazel was born, and she says a big thank you too!

And there is still a huge amount I didn't really get time to do. I don't know the choir as well as I should (though Mark, Claire and the choir might be haunted by my bad singing for years to come), and I really haven't had the time to get to know most of you in any depth. That is my loss, and I'm sorry.

So what are the results of all this busy-ness? Well, **in the UN**, I've helped speak truth to power and advocate in the Human Rights Council on issues ranging from the atrocities in Gaza and the DRC, the treatment of women, human rights in Iraq, through to South Sudan's unstable peace.

I've written reports talking about climate change and fossil fuels, the effects of prostitution, and business' impact on indigenous communities. I've been able to build relations with the UN Refuge Agency that could bring real partnership between the church and UN and huge benefits to refugees across the world.

I got to represent the Anglican Communion at an UN Ocean's conference in Nice and to visit refugee work in Romania. I was able to take the voices of Christians in Anglican churches around the world, and communicate them to the world's governments.

It has been a real privilege to serve the church in this role.

Here at Holy Trinity, as well as with services on Sunday mornings and evenings, and Thursdays – I've helped run the Death and Dying course, a Conflict Resolution course, Bible studies, helped with various "On The Ways", assisted the amazing Sunday School team, helped run the Lent Lunches and helped lead the Lent Away Day, assisted with the Advocacy course, attended church councils, helped clean the lake, helped (sadly just once) with Jardin de Montbrillant, helped the Summer and Christmas fairs, assisted the Youth Alpha, helped with the Nicaea course, led funerals and weddings, been a participant and clergy at Cursillo, and preached in Episcopal and Catholic churches. To name just some of the things that have happened!

And one of the great privileges of being in Geneva has been to learn about different countries and meet people from all over the world. Because (and I hope I've said this many times, but I mean it), I think the Bible really is telling us that **Jesus is calling us into, and to be, a new family. The Christian church is a family. We are all connected**, and the radical thing is, I should care as much about a Christian on the other side of the world as I do about my own biological relatives.

This is part of what Jesus is saying in our gospel reading. Choosing Jesus can mean placing the church family before your own biological one.

A privilege of my work at the UN has been to discover more about this crazy Christian church which we are called to be part of and to love.

The churches in Europe that are providing so much refugee care. The churches on the Pacific islands that are fighting against climate change and natural destruction. The churches in Kenya fighting against corruption and seeking justice. The churches in South Sudan and the DRC fighting for peace. Even Christians working in Gaza, undercover, remaining to serve and help Palestinians in the depth of suffering and despair.

And if Jesus is saying something in our gospel reading today, then he's saying **our commitment to this new thing, the church, has to be radical**. Most of us (thankfully) won't have to lose family members in order to identify as Christian. But, in some extreme situations, that choice has to be made. Would you choose Jesus and the people around you, if your family were going to reject you?

I love the film "The Godfather". It is an epic tale of mafia that has crime, murder, romance, deception, betrayal, culture and history ...all built around family. As an only child, I somewhat idealised that vision of loyalty and commitment and looking out for each other as the model family. Do you think I would make a good mafia don?

Now, older and wiser, I know much more about families, and that they are very messy! But the crazy thing is that God calls us to be part of a new family, and that, in Geneva, right now,

your family is around you. Jesus calls you to love them, even if you don't like them! **Because if you call yourself a follower of Christ, it is his reputation that is on the line if we don't love each other.**

So let us, for the sake of Jesus, show mercy, kindness, forgiveness to each other, and seek to encourage each other forwards in the love of God. **God's church is more than our own preferences.**

Today's reading also had a line about reading the signs. We see the clouds coming, we see flashes of lightning, we know a storm will break. But very often we are bad at seeing these warnings in our own lives.

When we were in Russia, Angela, myself and some friends went to the Arctic circle. On a walk, I decided to dive into a pile of snow. Angela and her friends could clearly see this would not end well, because it was super cold, I had cotton clothing, and I was underdressed.

Still, I dived in, and sure enough, it did not end well. The snow was hard, I came out wet, and on the whole it made me even colder.

Everyone could see it coming, but I still dived in!

So what is coming to Holy Trinity? What is coming now that you can prepare for? Sure enough, the building project is coming. But the stones are not the church. What about the people?

What can be done to protect the younger generation, to raise them in the faith? How can we – all of us – involve them, teach them apologetics, help them develop discipleship?

And what can we do when we get old, and it's harder to move around? How can we make things easier for us and others, and how can we look after each other?

Let's us be wise people and prepare for the future now. And let's get our priorities right, and put first things first.

So that's a call to love – by which I mean support, sacrificially give to, and think the best of – this church family. Let's treat each other as we would want to be treated.

And it's a call to see clearly what is coming, and to invite the Holy Spirit to help us make wise plans.

And finally, let's not miss the passage from Hebrews. It was reminding us of those who came before us, who have been the trailblazers of faith. It was reminding us of what was suffered, and how reminding us of how we are tied to them, just as the future generations are tied to us. We stand on our ancestors' work. Future generations will stand on what we do.

And so we are urged to lay aside things that weigh us down with worldly concerns, and to run the race before us, fixed on Jesus who endured agony for the sake of the higher purpose, of sacrificing himself for us.

This church in Geneva stands on good heritage.

Yes, the second ever minister here was **John Knox**, (I'm sure there is a "knock knock" joke to be had with his name...) the founder of the entire Presbyterian church movement (around 75 million people). He endured persecution from Catholic Queen Mary, was held as a prisoner of the French, and made to work as a galley slave. Yet he **held firm to his convictions and challenged the most powerful people in the world to practice what they professed to believe.**

Now, he was not perfect. I'm sure he was a pest and you wouldn't want him as a dinner guest. But what a legacy this broken man, who was used by God, left!

Geneva, where the world gathers, can still be a place where, just as Knox spoke truth to British monarchs, the church speaks truth to power. **Geneva can still be where the church requires politicians to practice what politicians profess to believe!**

Does this sound like Holy Trinity Geneva? If not, is there something we can do about that? For the book of Hebrews tells us to look to Jesus, and if we do that, we will start to see our lives transformed.

Jesus died to bring salvation to those who trust in him. And that salvation starts now. It transforms how we see each other. We begin to see each other as our own family.

We begin to see the world as crying out in pain for God's Kingdom to come. And we begin to find our own role in bringing love, peace, justice and restoration in the name of Jesus to this broken world.

In short, by seeking Jesus, to know his mind, to read his words, to memorise his teaching, to become like him, we can **find ourselves transformed** from selfish, inward-looking, puppets of consumerism, **into agents and diplomats for a greater vision, for a Kingdom of God** that is coming when his people hand over their hearts and minds to his control.

Let us be that people! Let us seek Jesus, submitting our lives to his greater purposes, and being part of something that truly will last forever. Let us make wise decisions, noting the times we are in. **And let us love each other, as Christ loves us.**