

Week Four: Jesus challenges our priorities

- 1. Zacchaeus was wealthy, but his encounter with Jesus led him to reassess his priorities. Where do people in our culture turn for help, guidance and transformation today?**

In fact of course in our culture today there is a wide range of choices for people seeking help – relationship counsellors, financial counsellors etc – you could make quite a list. On the whole however much of such help is offered on the premise that people need to be helped to understand themselves better. Less popular perhaps – and people are much more hesitant to approach – is the kind of help in which encouragement to a radical, and perhaps even painful, shift in lifestyle is the order of the day. Such was the kind of help that Zacchaeus needed: it is also the kind of help that the Christian church with its message of the challenge of gospel transformation has the responsibility to share in our society today.

- 2. What are your priorities and the priorities of your church? Put another way, how do you spend the majority of your time, effort and money?**

I am well aware – being married to an Anglican priest – of the many demands on church finances, and how they have increased very considerably in the last few years. Yet the principle that applies for individuals – of setting aside 5 % or ideally 10% of finances to ‘give away’ to support ministry and mission outside the immediate church community – seems an important one for churches to adopt, in spite of other pressures upon them. In my work for the Anglican Communion and for USPG I have been privileged to meet with Anglicans from other parts of the world who have a tiny fraction of our wealth, yet seem to be so cheerful, grateful for what they receive, and so hospitable to people like myself who have so much more.

- 3. Zacchaeus underwent a huge change in his priorities and lifestyle. What barriers might prevent us from making changes in our own lives and the life of the church?**

The recent global money crisis seems to be an eye-opener for many of the developed nations of the world. It has brought home to us how looped in to a complicated network of financial arrangements our lives seem to be. It is difficult to disentangle one piece from another. There is a spiral that includes mortgages, credit cards etc – that it seems difficult to break free from. Peter Selby, former bishop of Worcester, wrote a book reflecting on this called *Grace and Mortgage*, in which he argued how the global financial system seems to make it very difficult to live according to biblical economic principles. It may perhaps be that the current crisis will mean that in future we will be more prepared to learn about other systems – such as microeconomics – in which there is a greater relationship with the local (and wider) community.

4. The church is a global entity, but how often do we consider the lives of our brothers and sisters overseas? In what ways are we connected? How could our local church priorities fit better with God's global priorities?

Christianity owes many things to St Paul, and he has sometimes been criticised for this – often perhaps unjustly. However one spiritual treasure he gave to the Christian church is his deep image of the Body of Christ. 'Image' is probably too weak a word – for Paul 'the Body of Christ' was a reality around which his whole vision of the work of Christ and the life of the Church was shaped. And it is our membership of the Body of Christ that needs to 'convict' us: it is on the basis of being fellow-members of 'one Body' that our attitudes and actions towards fellow Christians near and far need to be worked – perhaps working through a Society such as USPG. USPG has worked hard in recent years not simply to support the work and mission of Anglican churches in other parts of the world, but also to develop ways in which those churches can also be involved in the process of making financial decisions. It is important for Christians in the West to be able to hear – as well as to help – their fellow-Christians in the non-western world.