

St John Devizes—Matins Trinity 19—Amos 5:6-7, 10-15 & Hebrews 4:12-16

I wonder how many people here this morning will remember the TV series *The Good Life*, a 70's situation comedy about a married couple who wanted to escape the rat like existence of executive life, and become self-sufficient. The title *The Good Life* was a clever play on the surname of the lead couple, Tom and Barbara Good. And my recollection of the series was that they never really enjoyed the good life, as their existence was pretty basic and hand to mouth. Many others might have tried this and will have met a measure of success as they strive for a good life.

A theme running through our readings today is about seeking a good life, or at least living well. I don't mean living the high life, feeding off the fat of the land, gaining wealth or power or any of the other trappings of success by which the world measures "a good life". I'm talking about following the path which God wishes us tread.

Amos doesn't mess about in his message. He was one of those great prophets who weren't afraid to tell it as it is. "Seek the Lord and live". The implication is that without the Lord we are not alive. He then lists the dire consequences of not following the Lord – destruction of one kind or another. It is not the sort of threatening message that goes down well these days and we might be tempted not to read further but hidden in the verses that follow is the recipe for a good life. The final verse of the reading sums it up:-

Be prudent in speech; watch what you say, at all times;
Seek good and not evil; be aware of the good you can do;
Establish justice; by loving mercy—always

The Hebrews reading gives us further incentives to live well, because the word of God is living and active. The word of God who was in the beginning with God, that word is alive and active and watching over all we do. That might sound a bit like Big Brother watching us, but I interpret it as God watching over us because he cares and we also have the reassurance of the gift of the Holy Spirit to support us in living well.

I wonder what challenges you face in trying to lead a good life, in following Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. Whatever the challenges are, keep working at them, but remember that whatever you do will not be enough to earn your way into God's Kingdom. The people of the Old Testament had only the Laws of Moses to guide them as to how they should live. That is why Amos was so prescriptive about the consequences of not following those laws. We have the benefit of Jesus, God incarnate, as the pattern for how we should live. We can't hide anything from God, and no matter how good we think we are, he knows the real us. He knows the things, the "wealth" we find hard to give up. The teaching is so hard that even the disciples were perplexed. But Jesus says that although these things may be impossible for mortals, they are not for God. That is why Jesus came, the only perfect one, the one who died in our place, a sign of God's love for us. Jesus conquered death, for us. He is the way to eternal life. All we have to do is believe in him.

So that's OK then we can do as we please, as long as we believe! Well, no. Because if we truly believe then we will want to respond to that overwhelming love, by loving God and those God himself loves. Love for others, love for God's creation, love for his Son, love in response to his love for us rather than in fear of his retribution when we get it wrong; that is what should motivate us to live well.

I'm sorry we were not able to meet together yesterday as planned. But I have enjoyed the preparations for that meeting. The Rector and I sat down and reflected on where you have grown as a congregation in the past twelve months. I was impressed at hearing the stories of how you have engaged with the town's people of Devizes. I heard how you have begun to respond to Bishop Nicholas' questions—What do you pray for? Whom do you serve? And How will you grow? I've seen a copy of a proposal for a programme of opportunities for Reflection, Discovery and Fellowship. Do collect one of the booklets after the service! You've picked up the Micah imperative to Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. The breadth and depth of your vision is breathtaking and innovative. I would just urge and encourage you to pace and measure your vision so that you become companions to one another, as Christ is our companion throughout our lives. I trust and hope that you, each of you, as part of the Body of Christ in St John's and St Mary's, will be able to take ownership of the vision, and play your part in ensuring the vision can be realized. Then the good life will be a beacon of hope for those who do not yet know the love of the Lord Jesus.

So love Jesus, then we will want to live well, but even when we get it wrong we can say sorry, confident that through Christ, the great high priest of whom Hebrews speaks, we will obtain mercy and forgiveness.

It is with the assurance that God is with us all through the process of life and through death that we can feel confident of being in his presence for all time. We need to put Jesus back at the centre of all we say think and do. We need to remind ourselves that we are the Easter people, and that Jesus who was crucified and died, is now risen and alive, and continues to offer us a good life—a life of purpose and fruitfulness.

We can have confidence in that because as we have a great high priest who has already passed that way. In his name we can approach the throne of grace with boldness, and receive mercy and grace in Jesus name.

Jesus says “Trust in God, trust also in me”. If we do that each of us can strive to live well, and when the time comes, by following in Jesus’ footsteps, to die well too.

Amen.