# afc1_logo_cmyk copy 17th November 2013

**Luke 21.5 - 19**

## Trust

*Lord God – our prayer is that the written word will point us to Christ, the Living Word – so in his name we pray and for his voice we listen. Amen*.

I’m fortunate enough to have a good friend whom I’ve known since I was 19 years old. We still meet up every few months or so and exchange what’s happening in our lives. We often laugh at how the topic of conversation has changed as the years have gone by:

* When we were 19 we talked about what jobs we hoped to have when we had finished our studies
* Then in our twenties we talked about getting engaged and married.
* Mortgages were soon on the agenda
* In our late twenties and thirties we were talking about pregnancy and childbirth.
* Our children’s development seemed to occupy our conversations through our thirties and forties as our offspring morphed from toddlers into teenagers.
* It wasn’t long before we were talking about pensions and where we would like to retire to.
* And to our amusement, when we met a couple of weeks ago, we found that the topic of our conversation was whether our houses could be adapted in the future to install a Stannah Stair lift.

A whole life time nearly, shared with a good friend. Part of what we were doing was to give voice to current issues in our lives. The things and people that were important to us. But we were also sharing our common concerns about the future. What would it hold for us? Would we be able to cope?

Today we’ve been celebrating Charlotte’s blessing. This is a very special time of giving thanks to God for the gift of Charlotte and for all that she means to her family and friends now. But part of her blessing today is also to put our **trust** in God for her future. We have no idea what the future will hold for Charlotte or for any of us, but we can be sure that God loves each one of us unconditionally and is like the most loving parent we could ever imagine. And so this is the kind of God we put our **trust** in as we pray for Charlotte’s growth and development as a child of God. We heard in Psalm 127, that Jayne read, “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth.” It’s a lovely image of a parent’s role to launch a child into his or her future – just like an arrow being released from a bow. It’s a process of letting go by using all one’s abilities and gifts but also a strong element of **trust** in the unknown. The writer Kahlil Gibran wrote something similar in his poem on Children:

You are the bows from which your children  
as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,   
and He bends you with His might   
that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,   
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

In today’s reading from St Luke’s Gospel Jesus challenges the disciples to think about what is important in their lives but also to consider what will sustain them for the future. It might all be summed up in that one word: **TRUST**.

It’s quite clear that the Temple in Jerusalem was very important to the disciples. It was a physical and emotional symbol of all that was central to the both the traditional Jewish faith and to the evolving faith of those early Jewish followers of Jesus. It was the customary for Jews to make at least an annual pilgrimage to the Temple, to offer sacrifices and to worship and meet fellow pilgrims there. The disciples admire the beautiful stones and ornaments that adorn what was King Herod’s reconstruction of the great Temple set high on Mount Moriah and dominating the Jerusalem skyline.

The Jewish historian Josephus, who died some 70 years after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, wrote about the outward facing walls of the Temple being covered with plates of gold so that when the sun rose they reflected back what he described as “a very fiery splendour”.

Luke was, of course, writing his Gospel after the Temple had been destroyed by the Romans in AD70 and part of his purpose is to encourage his readers. Even though the most splendid symbol of God’s presence has been destroyed – God still exists and remains faithful to his people. And so, to make his point, Luke portrays Jesus warning his listeners not to put all their faith and trust in the Temple building– as if God’s presence could only be contained within its walls. Jesus gives a warning to his listeners: “These things you are gazing at – the time will come when not one stone will be left upon another; they will all be thrown down.” It’s perhaps a salutary reminder to us not to put too much store by our Church buildings, however much we love them and however much they become for us symbols of what is distinctive about us as churches.

Both Amersham Free Church and St Michael’s have been through major refurbishments in the last few years, and I know that you have ongoing plans both for Phase Two for this building and for your organ restoration here. But I wonder if, God forbid, Amersham were to suffer some major natural disaster – like the current devastation following the typhoon in the Philippines – and if our church buildings were razed to the ground, would Amersham Free Church or St Michael’s still continue to exist? Of course they would – because we know that the church is the people rather than the building. The church is ultimately a community who put their trust in God rather than in stones, bricks or mortar

Luke is writing his Gospel during a time of great turmoil for the early Christian church. The early Church was suffering brutal persecution not only from traditional Jews – such people as Saul of Tarsus (later to become St Paul) but also by the Roman authorities. Luke’s sequel to his Gospel, “The Acts of the Apostles” describes how those early Christians under such leaders as St Paul, shared everything they had in the face of persecution, met in each other’s homes and put their trust in God in spite of being ostracized not only by the authorities but often by their very own families

And so Jesus encourages them not to be defensive when they face opposition but to trust that God will give them the words to say:

“This will be your opportunity to testify” he says. “So resolve not to prepare your defence beforehand, because I myself will give you such words and wisdom as no opponent can resist or refute. … by standing firm you will win yourselves life.”

We are very fortunate in this country that we do not suffer persecution for our faith unlike people in many parts of the world, from Pakistan to China. And only a couple of days ago we heard Baroness Warsi warning about the possible extinction of Christianity in such regions as Syria and Iraq. We are free not only to worship in our own public church buildings but also, on occasions like today, we can worship ecumenically so that it is very natural for Ian, your minister, to lead worship at St Michael’s and for me to lead worship here.

**Trust** is very much something for the present moment. We’re encouraged to live each day in a spirit of openness both to God and to the people around us, sharing our resources and listening to one another. As we think of the Philippines, the generous response from all around the world is a great encouragement that we have within us both the desire and the ability to respond to the needs of the world.

But to be able to **trust** is perhaps most challenging when we face a future that is partially unknown for all of us.

* Whether we are entrusting a baby into God’s hands asking for a blessing on her life
* Whether we are a young person who has recently left school or university and is wondering whether he will get a job
* Whether we are making marriage vows using the words: “For richer, for poorer; in sickness or in health”
* Or whether we are retired and are wondering how many years of health and mobility we shall enjoy

All of these life situations invite us to put our trust in God who stays with us throughout all the changes in our lives.

I shall end with some words from Gateways into Prayer on your service sheet today. I think they sum it all up:

**And, even though I cannot know how I shall react when sorely tested,**

**help me to trust you with the things I fear the most,**

**far in the future or near at hand,**

**as I pray for peace and strength to persevere.**

Diana Glover

17 November 2013