



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE  
in the City of New York  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

Sunday, August 11, 2019  
*The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost*

*Choral Eucharist  
at 11:00 a.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Ryan Bennett, *Assisting Priest*  
on  
Genesis 15:1-6, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16, and Luke 12:32-40  
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### Treasure and Heart

Come Holy Spirit, giver of life and love. For our hallowing, give us words which pass into prayer, prayer which passes into love and love which is life with you forever. *Amen.*

Toni Morrison has left a profound legacy for this country and indeed the world at large. As a writer, Morrison was not shy in delving into the complex layers of the human heart and mind. Within her books she wrestled with one of the most profound questions for human beings, what makes up the sum of who we are, especially in the light and stark reality of oppression and inequality at many levels?

In her award-winning novel *Beloved*, we met a series of characters whose lives are interwoven by slavery, degradation and oppression. Within this brutal back drop there is a desire to seek to find a deeper sense of purpose which can transcend the brokenness and tragedy of the story. The title *Beloved* translates into **Be-loved**. The main character, who has escaped her slave owners, seeks to both face the traumas she's lived through and not let them define her future as she longs for new hope, new life. Love is the ingredient that will see her through into this new life. It breaks through all what she has thought inescapable in her past life and opens for her a new understanding of herself.

I note here, that Morrison's books hold a significance for Australians as well, as we've had to face past wrongs committed against our first-nation people's and walking the road towards full reconciliation and recognition. Reflecting on the tributes for Morrison this past week, along with evoking memories of reading her books at University has helped me reflect on the gospel passage more clearly this morning.

Jesus is offering his listeners a new vision of what it is like to live both an integrated and abundant life in God's company. Love is the key to the question. It's a love which is often hard won, often hidden within layers which are both within and outside our control. In this space, it can be easy to become anxious and the anxiety can be like an inescapable foe which can feel void of love and purpose.

I suspect, that many of the things which may feel like inescapable foes for us, fade into dim comparison when we hold them up to the characters and backdrop of Morrison's novels, but none the less, where do we find both sustaining and transforming love today?

Jesus sees the level of anxiety within his hearers. They are anxious about their livelihood and maintaining the life they have created for themselves. He sees within them, that they seek to maintain what they have created at any cost. Their sense of self is caught up in an anxiety which can be self-perpetuating and all consuming. Here, he invites them along with you and me to see a new way of living. Deeper riches will be offered to them, to us - if can open our lives to share a relationship with God.

This relationship centres us in a knowledge of who we truly are, created in the likeness and image of God. Love incarnate for all people is made fully human in the life and teaching of Jesus.

This knowledge helps us to understand what Jesus really means by telling us to sell our possessions and making purses which last. In the context of divine generosity, all else pales into significance. Long term, our possessions won't sustain us in the way that God's love holds us close.

In recognising our possessions for their true value, teaches us to be mindful that: We define them and they don't define us.

To know this, to live this, stirs up a spirit of generosity within us. Internally steering us towards using our earthly goods and chattels so that they themselves can be used to assist in both renewing and transforming lives.

One of the greatest challenges within our present global context is that in a growing cycle of uncertainty resulting in a polarisation of both peoples and ideas, makes it challenging for the church at times to proclaim that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. There is no easy answer to this question bar this; in the way we live, in the way we share, does this promote that the Kingdom of God has come near? This is where both our treasure and heart, together should rest. Hopefully we find a freedom here which generates love.

Morrison offers us a helpful reflection on this point; "Freeing yourself is one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another. The function of freedom is to free someone else."

If the human heart is hungry to make the Kingdom of God known both in word and action, then our motivations will be energised from a place of all embracing love and wholeness. A lifelong pursuit. We, here today, are the agents of God's all embracing love. To be channels of this love will cost us. It will cost us to confront those parts of each of us which hold us back from living fully in the company of others.

We are called to have eyes and ears which are wired to see signs of promoting God's Kingdom, whatever the cost. This is what underlines the sharp words of Jesus is addressing his followers to always be alert and not be caught off guard in fulfilling the work which lies before us. As we know, both anxiety and fear, if unchecked can create apathy and inertia. This is where we are not called to be.

For Christian leaders along with leader who has responsibility for others lies this calling – we are called to be on guard. On guard in equipping those who are in our care to be confident agents of change and transformation. A work for which we need to give adequate account. To know this helps us unlock the understanding of what Jesus means by be ready and be on guard.

In 2019, Morrison spoke these words in reflecting on the world as she views it. She offers both astute insights along with life giving opportunity;

"Our past is bleak. Our future dim. But I am not reasonable. A reasonable man adjusts to his environment. An unreasonable man does not. All progress, therefore, depends on the unreasonable man. I prefer not to adjust to my environment. I refuse the prison of 'I' and choose the open spaces of 'we'."

We may or may not agree with all that Morrison speaks here. Personally, I think the world is changing, on many fronts and we need to name that. Within that change, recognising hope is still our calling. Paul speaks words in the letter to the Hebrews which should drive us as a people of faith;

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

One thing I hope we can agree on is that we share a common desire to choose the open spaces of "we" when we aspire to proclaim kingdom values. The time is surely now.