

Sermon for 4.8.19 Rev'd Jenny Simson

The readings today express the lavish way that God gives of himself to his creation and in particular to his beloved children.

The Old Testament reading is a revelation of God's nature. In it, we hear the intimacy in the father - child relationship between Israel and God and how God's compassionate love overcomes the repetitive ingratitude of Israel.

The Psalm today sings out about thanksgiving for deliverance from many troubles - *"let them give thanks to Yahweh for his love, for his wonders to human beings."*

The Epistle, speaks about the new life in Christ and how we are to claim the very renewal in which Christ is all and in all!

And the gospel warns us about how we can forget to remember the wonder and lavish nature of God in our lives when we store up material possessions and attempt to take over control and make it our centre focus.

So let's take a closer look at the gospel story.

The story begins with Jesus refusing to be drawn into a conversation that seeks his mediation between two brothers and the issue of inheritance. According to Deut. 21.17 the eldest son received double the younger's share. However, writes theologian Leon Morris, there was sometimes room for doubt and in this case the man who spoke up felt that an injustice was being done.<sup>1</sup>

The man who asks Jesus to mediate is treating Jesus as a typical Rabbi, for the rabbi's customarily gave decisions on disputed points of law. Jesus, however is different, he shows no interest in ensuring equitable division and subsequently warns against greed and material self-satisfaction.

He came to bring people to God, not to bring property to people. *"Friend, who sent me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"*

Jesus' concern lay with the attitudes of those involved, not with who got what. He warns disciples about the futility of a life in which amassing possessions became their security.

He tells about the rich fool who builds bigger barns to store his worldly possessions thinking that his provision will bring him joy and contentment in life.

The death of the individual as a time of reckoning is in view – and Jesus asks the question **to whom shall it go** – this is a focus of the story and directs readers to ask the basic question – *What is life all about*. In verse 21, the gospel writer gives his own answer to the question – find the meaning in life by relationship with God and being generous in that relationship.

Theologian Robert J. Karris writes: *Note how frequently in this passage the "fool" uses "I" and "my". . . His egotistical concerns eliminate God and neighbour from sight.*<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Revised edition *Luke*. Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, 1992. P232

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. The Gospel According to Luke in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Geoffrey Chapman: London. 1993, p. 704

The conversation he has with his soul reveals the narrowness of his thought process. It is as if nothing else exists. He tells his soul that his provision is so good that he can '*sit back and relax – drink and be merry*'.

At this point we might well ask; what's wrong with providing for ourselves? Building a future for our children or for our older age or retirement. What's wrong with having a substantial nest egg?

And of course the answer to this, is, nothing. This parable is not saying these things are wrong or bad, for it is our responsibility to provide for ourselves when we can.

What the parable is saying, in part at least, is that we are not to clutter up our focus with these desires. Theologian Iain Matthew suggests that there comes a time when we can say, I don't need this – but I do need you God. I don't need this at the centre of my focus not because it is bad but because whenever desire is "out of order" and we mean it that way – it is not a one-off, but an habitual condition and it will be in need of addressing. Greed in whichever way it presents itself- tends to keep us small minded with a narrow vision and whichever area of life may be ones battleground– the quality of one's whole life is involved.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus promotes the notion that we are to make space for God in our everyday life for this will broaden our horizons.

St John of the cross 16<sup>th</sup> Century Saint and mystic constantly prayed for *Nada* - nothingness - for he believed that when he was empty – in this nothingness – the ground was clear to make way for the rush of the lavishness of God into his everyday life.

This is the issue –we are called to affirm a greater love and transcend our cravings for the sake of that love.

In practical everyday terms it means that we can be contented with the smaller things in life. Perhaps in the beauty of God around us in the natural world or by taking note of the niceness of others whom we meet- or a young ones smile or question that seeks our wisdom. It means being open to receiving and valuing the present moment so that we are a part of the steadfast joy of God in our lives through witness and gratitude for the things that we have been given.

Only in and through our relationship with God, I believe, can we see beyond the fear that promotes self- centred control and beyond the illusion that things are so doable that we can make it on our own - In our relationship with God are we enabled a clearer vision of ourselves and our neighbour.

Only In our relationship with God do we become the new creation in Christ that Paul speaks about in the epistle this morning.

Today's gospel reading is about Gods love for us guiding us and keeping us alert to personal desires taking over from God as the centre of our lives, and as such it holds great relevance for every era in time.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, Empty us from desires that take over our focus – and help us to keep you as our centre focus. Lift our heads to see the broad horizons of your love for us in the smaller and joyous things in our daily lives. In Christ we pray.

Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Iain Matthew. *The Impact of God: Soundings from St John of the Cross*. Hodder: London, 2010. P43.