

"Rich towards God", Seventh Sunday of Trinity, August 4th 2019.

Luke 12:13-21, also Colossians 3:1-11.

"Be Rich towards God", Jesus says this is a key value for us in our walk with Him. Let us stand in that crowd, listen closely to what Jesus is saying.

Someone in the crowd shout - "Teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Just before this, we would have seen the crowd is growing around them, in fact so many, Luke says "they were trampling on one another". Jesus has been teaching his disciples, more about what following Him, would mean - and he teaches them, to follow him does ask sacrifices of us, it can and will mean unpopularity, as he says his disciples will be brought before rulers, synagogues. Following means sacrificial service. Yet in those hard times of unpopularity or opposition they will not be alone. The Holy Spirit will provide for them in such a setting - the words and wisdom they need. And he reminds them and us, these disciples, that they are valuable to God - the hairs on their and our heads are numbered, he is so attentive to us, he knows all about us and pays attention to the smallest detail of our lives.

So with such teaching just finishing, a man from the crowd shouts to get his earthly possessions.

You know, if we were there, and heard that sound, it would have made us think. *Am I willing to do what the Lord asks of me? What's my priority in life?*

"Teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." What is going on? The father has died. He has not left an spoken or written will. The estate is to be held by the two brothers. The laws of those times, the land cannot be divided until the older

brother agrees. So this man, is a younger brother - another unhappy one Jesus will later tell a parable about! - for this younger brother, this is about justice. He knows what is just and he wants Jesus to enforce it. The brother does not ask for Jesus to bring reconciliation or to mediate. The man says, "tell my brother, he is wrong how he is acting, I want justice, give me my rights. (again very similar to the young brother in the Lost Sons Parable - Dad, I want my rights now, my inheritance now...).

Do we see possessions prioritized over relationships?

Jesus is not impressed: "Man, who appointed me judge or arbiter between you?" Sometimes that word, arbiter is translated divider. Jesus did not come to confirm or generate division in that family over income or possessions. Jesus came among us to heal relationships between people, and from that place of healing, people can deal with the issues that divided them. Jesus doesn't answer the young brother's request, for will finalise the brokenness of the relationship. Jesus did not come to steal, kill destroy, he came to bring life, to heal, to reconcile. So to do likewise is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus - Jesus, Friend, Lord, Saviour, Teacher, Victor and Healer. *Relationships over possessions.*

Another question. *Who is in charge of your life?*

This man calls on Jesus to act. He asks Jesus to use his status and authority to get what he wants. Teacher tell my brother... He does not want that status and authority of the Son of Man to influence or shape *his* life. He is using Jesus. Is Jesus about what we get from him? Do we make our requests of him but deep down, perhaps, don't want him to disturb us too much? Last week we focused on the Lord's Prayer. Jesus encourages us to bring our own requests to him, promising the Father listens. But also he teaches a model, a set of themes to pray for. As we pray those words, and themes, as we pray other scriptural prayers such as

Paul has written, the mind of Christ is being slowly formed within us. His priorities - the honouring of the name, the kingdom priority, to trust and depend - become increasingly our priority...
Who really is in charge of your life?

Jesus goes to the core of what he believes is the issue. He declares to this massive crowd: "Life does not consist in abundance of possessions."

Money, possessions can be connected to fear - fear if we do not have them, or a fear that we do not have enough. There is an insecurity. A feeling we do not have enough or enough of that and it drives us to acquire more. Paul tells us in Colossians 3:5 - "Set your hearts on things above, set your minds on things above... Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which is idolatry." Greed is about having more for yourself. To get ones hands on whatever one can. To acquire without considering your needs, you acquire your wants. To acquire without considering the situation of others and how it affects them. (cf WBC, Luke commentary). If we were with Jesus for sometime, we would have remembered, this was not the first time he gave a warning to his followers, about the power of possessions: Parable of the Sower - Luke 8 : The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by life's worries riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." And Paul in 1 Timothy 5: "for the love of money is a root for all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you man of God, flee from all of this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." (5:10-6:1). The issue is not wealth, is not about gaining money through business skills or being an entrepreneur, it is what your pursuit? And the warning, of how that can cripple your walk with Jesus. *Who or what is in charge of your life?*

Jesus is concerned about needs. This young brother is concerned about his. Jesus sees a self centred cry for justice - a symptom of an inner sickness. He does not answer the cry, he strives to heal the condition that produced the cry. And so tells the famous parable.

"A certain rich man, whose land brought forth plenty." The man is already rich. His land then produces a great crop. He didn't work harder, employ more workers, no strategic plan, no mission statement. The crop, that year, is, just, so much greater. A gift from God to him, is what Jesus suggests. What will he do? For he is already rich... It is not wrong that he has had a bumper harvest. However the euphoria, joy, of the an abundant harvest has made the rich man lose his perspective Jesus tells us. He has forgot those who helped him - the workers, the stewards, those at the threshing floor - he has forgot his continuing need to trust and depend on God, and he has forgotten life is a loan, a gift.

So "he discussed with himself, what shall I do?" A soliquay, like in Shakespeare character on a stage, we understand his true thinking. However, a theologian, Ken Bailey, draws out, in the Middle East, that significant decisions, normally involve others family, friends etc, communal conversations. Yet this man, discusses with *himself*. Is he alone. Has his wealth or his view of his wealth caused him *to become alone or to act alone? How has wealth / possessions affected relationships around him?*

"What shall I do" , says the man. He has no place to store his new abundance. He has no awareness that the bumper crop is a gift from God. No awareness to use it as the true owner has directed in his Scripture or may direct through other means. It is his crops. Not the Lords. No consideration - to parallel with Joseph, how he can use this abundance to benefit others.

The rich man says, to say it more literally: "And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."" *What is your soul about?* When you hear the word soul, the Hebrew word in OT would be nephesh. A psalm to consider - we all know it - Psalm 42:1-2. "as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God, when can I go and meet with God?" The psalmist considers the deer in the desertlands, as they thirst for water in a dry land. In a similar way - his soul - his nephesh - thirsts for God. Not the rich fool - whose nephesh is fully satisfied with food and drink, things of this life. Augustine of Hippo - theologian - famously said: "My soul is restless until it rests on thee." The rich man's view - my soul is restless until I am assured of an over abundance of food, drink, possessions.

For the Hebrews Body and Spirit form one whole, they cannot be dissolved, so nephesh you could say, is about life - what is your life about? *What do you thirst for? What will bring you rest? What will satisfy you?*

The way the Rich Man says it - his life responsibilities come to an end now he has a secure economic future. "Take life easy, drink be merry." His responsibilities *had not come* to an end, they had begun. Having spent 4 weeks on Ruth, it is striking comparing Boaz and this rich farmer. Boaz, who acknowledges and blesses those who work for him, a man of wealth, yet generosity beyond the law, willing to help others, even if it brings some loss to himself. This rich farmer, forgets all others, stores it up, and personally wants to enjoy it.

God declares that night, that he is a fool, that his life was a gift, like his wealth. And while he looked to the many years of provision he had to enjoy, only a few hours of his life remain. And God asks who will get the wealth now that you will die?"

Jesus says: he who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God, he is one who continues to work / to labor for himself alone, and fails to gain real wealth. Jesus asks the younger brother - what is it that you seek - is it like the rich farmer, gain wealth, your responsibilities come to an end, your life is seemingly secure, you beat your brother. Is that true wealth?

So to be rich towards God? To summarise... It is about.

Sacrificial Service;

Trust we are valued;

Relationships over possessions

Bring healing and life

He - God - is in charge

Wealth is gift

Thirst for the Lord

Be a good steward of your life and your possessions.

Shall we pray..Father God, the author and giver of all good things, write in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true wealth towards you, nourish us with all goodness, and in your grace and mercy keep us from straying away, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.