

PENTECOST 8C 31072022 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Hosea 11.1-11; Psalm 107.1-9, 43; Colossians 3.1-11; Luke 12.13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'

But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?'

And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.'

Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

The prophet Hosea describes God as like a loving parent who loves Israel as one loves a little child, with tender, loving kindness, promising to bring the people home from exile. God determines not to punish them with the fierce anger they deserve but to exercise compassion. The God who called Israel out of Egypt will call the exiles back to their own country.

In Luke's gospel we hear of a man who demanded that Jesus sort out his disputed inheritance; but Jesus didn't come for that purpose, and warned him to take care that greed didn't get hold of him.

Land and its ancestral inheritance were and still are central symbols in Judaism.

The Parable of the Rich Fool targets not only the man who wanted his share of the family inheritance but the nation of Israel which prided itself on national security, claiming more and more territory, ancestral and otherwise: does this sound familiar?

NT Wright has written, "Israel did not realise that her God was asking questions at another level altogether, summoning her back to being the light of the world, ordering her national life with justice and mercy and becoming a beacon of hope to the nations. How can being the people of God be ultimately a matter of sacred turf, if Israel is to be the light of the world?

How can litigious and grasping behaviour reflect the generous and forgiving love of God?"

The modern-day state of Israel might do well to ask itself the same question, given its treatment of Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

The parable of the rich fool also asks questions of us- questions that might be uncomfortable and unsettling. After all, what's wrong with storing up resources for the future? Isn't it a good thing to be careful and sensible stewards of what we are given?

Appropriate concern for the future must be balanced with giving glory to God and caring for our neighbours, providing for the poor and those without access to wealth.

The wealthy farmer did none of these things, thinking only of himself and his own comfort. He could not see beyond what he considered to be his: his barns, his grain, his goods. He forgot that all these are gifts from God and his responsibility was to share his abundance with those who have none.

He had fallen into the trap of idolatry; as the letter to the Colossians tells us, greed is idolatry because if we centre our lives on money, or the acquisition of wealth or possessions, we have no room for God.

It is easy to see how we are tempted towards this idolatry when we consider the tactics used to sell to us. We are told, 'Because you're worth it!'. We are told we deserve the nice house, new car, overseas trips, lovely clothes, the best golf clubs- or whatever it is that appeals to us.

We are told that we must squirrel away plenty of money in superannuation or other investments so we can continue our great lifestyle when we retire.

In themselves, these things are neither bad nor good. If, however, they have a greater priority for us than living according to what Jesus commands then they become like idols to us.

Tomorrow is the beginning of Homelessness Week, which seeks to draw our attention to the number of people who are without homes in Australia. The theme for this year is '**To end homelessness we need a plan.**'

Did you know that in Australia, there are over 116,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night? Why are there so many homeless people in a comparatively wealthy country like Australia?

A country that prides itself on having low levels of taxation while there are so many homeless people living in poverty is surely not doing what Jesus expects us to do.

According to Homelessness Australia, "We need a national plan to end homelessness to properly address the issues driving rising homelessness, and to respond effectively so that homelessness is prevented where possible and quickly resolved when people do lose their home."

Anglicare WA works with people experiencing housing issues, homelessness or at risk of homelessness, providing support to seek stable housing arrangements and connect with emergency relief options or financial counselling support.

However, Anglicare WA housing programs are all currently full, with wait lists of up to two months. As part of our commitment to faith-giving, this parish donates money to Anglicare every year; you might like to explore giving your own donation to help Anglicare help the homeless.

What does it mean for us, this parish, to be 'rich towards God'? What are our values in terms of the money we have? Is what we save for and spend driven by mission? Or is our mission limited by our giving? Our parish treasurer has noted that our regular offerings have decreased over the last little while. There may be a variety of reasons for this, but we all need to prayerfully consider what God is asking us to contribute to the mission of the church.

The abundant life that Jesus came to bring is marked by generosity. Life and possessions are gifts from God to be used to advance God's agenda of care and compassion for those who lack resources to provide for themselves.

There are no storage barns in heaven; God instead invites us into the eternal economy of the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

The Lord be with you.