

Dear friends,

This week we are looking again at another well-known story – that of the rich fool – warning us not to depend on material goods as we would be looking in the wrong direction for true support and comfort. Of course, parables don't always speak into every situation. Our world is financially quite different from that in which Jesus lived, yet this parable does offer us some eternal truths about our relationship with the future. I hope that you are all keeping as well as is possible and, as always, I wish you every blessing. Margaret

Call to Worship:

Downhearted or inspired – fed-up or joyful – eager or reluctant, we come just as we are to be with God as God is. Let us worship God together.

Lord God, we come with our love seeking your love afresh.

We come with our questions seeking your guidance.

We come with our certainties seeking your challenge.

We come with our sinfulness seeking your forgiveness.

So come, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and be whatever you need to be to us today.

Living God, we lay down now all that weighs heavily on our minds and ask to be clothed in hope.

We bring all our mistakes and ask to be clothed in understanding.

We bring all that limits our vision and diminishes our love and ask to be clothed with a new focus and a fresh start. Amen.

The words to 'As the deer pants for the water' written by Martin J. Nystrom [b. 1956] StF 544

1 As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

Refrain: You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

2 I want you more than gold or silver, only you can satisfy.

You alone are the real joy-giver and the apple of my eye. *Refrain*.....

3 You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king.

I love you more than any other, so much more than anything. *Refrain*.....

Prayer including the Lord's Prayer.

God of richness beyond our imagining – of love beyond our comprehension – of giving beyond our worth – of forgiveness beyond our earning – of generosity beyond anything we need, we thank you and we adore you. Amen.

For our lack of generosity and giving, of caring and sharing – Lord, forgive us.

For our neglect of need of body, mind or soul – Lord, forgive us.

For our silence when words would have healed, and for harsh words which need not have been spoken – Lord, forgive us.

For our living which fails to put into practice what we hear of you and from you – Lord, forgive us.

For our ignoring of your truths, your ways, your words – Lord, forgive us. Amen.

We have confessed our sins, Lord. Jesus taught us to pray to you, and he promised that our sins would be forgiven. We trust in your promises, and amid the cacophony of noise that life throws at us, may we hear your word: 'My son, my daughter, my child, your sins are forgiven. Go and live well to the glory of my name and the good of all.'

Praise be to you, creator God, for the world around us in all its wonder and variety, for the richness and diversity it offers, for nature – the sea, the air, the plants and animals, and for human beings.

Praise be to you, eternal God, that from one generation to the next you are our God and we are your people. We are all different to one another, but each of us is of equal value to you.

Praise be to you, loving God, for the love you have shown and the love we have been given by those who know you. Praise to you that you inspire us to share and to receive such love.

Praise be to you, generous God, for sufficiency beyond our imagining if only we will trust you and be guided by you.

Praise be to God, our Father and Mother, for the gift of Jesus.

Praise be to God the Son, for walking this earth, teaching, showing, guiding, giving, living, dying.

Praise be to God the Holy Spirit, for dwelling within us and setting our hearts aflame with love for the world.

Praise be to God. Amen

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 12: 13-21. [Holy Bible: Easy-to-Read Version. Copyright 2006 by World Bible Translation Center, Inc. and used by permission]

One of the men in the crowd said to Jesus: 'Teacher, our father just died and left some things for us. Tell my brother to share them with me.'

But Jesus said to him: 'Who said I should be your judge or decide how to divide your father's things between you two?' Then Jesus said to them: 'be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. People do not get life from the many things they own.'

Then Jesus used this story: 'There was a rich man who had some land. His land grew a very good crop of food. He thought to himself: "What will I do? I have no place to keep all my crops."

Then he said: "I know what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger barns! I will put all my wheat and good things together in my new barns. Then I can say to myself, I have many good things stored. I have saved enough for many years. Rest, eat, drink and enjoy life!"

But God said to that man: "Foolish man! Tonight, you will die. So, what about the things you prepared for yourself? Who will get those things now?"

This is how it will be for anyone who saves things only for himself. To God that person is not rich.'

Meditation of a listener to Jesus. [A Most Amazing Man written by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2009 Nick Fawcett]

He didn't mean me, I decided. Well, he couldn't, could he, for I wasn't rich, not by a mile – and though I wouldn't have minded a bit extra in my pocket, the occasional luxury at home, I could hardly be termed greedy either.

No, he must have had others in mind, people who are always after more – you know the sort I mean. Only I thought afterwards about what he'd said, about there being more than one type of greed, and suddenly I wasn't so sure he didn't mean me after all, for I am greedy in all sorts of ways – for happiness, security, success, comfort, to name but some – and though there is nothing wrong with those in themselves, there is if we try to turn them into possessions, as though we cling on to them, make them our own.

We just can't do that, not in this life – and if we look for meaning in this world alone it will surely slip from our grasp, like sand running through our fingers.

On what is our life based? That's the question he was asking. The things of God, or the things of earth?

We can possess much yet have nothing – own little but have all.

True contentment is in God's hands – whether we find it is in *ours*.

.....

Forgive us, Lord, for we spend so much of our lives chasing illusory happiness, thirsting for what can never satisfy – pursuing riches on earth rather than treasure in heaven.

Teach us where true fulfilment lies and help us truly to seek the things of your kingdom and to work for these with the same effort with which we work for worldly wealth - and so find contentment indeed.

Amen.

Comment:

The brother who refuses to share his inheritance is like the man in the parable who hoards his grain and goods. They are both driven by greed. The previous parables in this series all include a neighbour, with heroes who are generous and hospitable at some cost to themselves [think of the Good Samaritan among others]. But the self-sufficient and self-obsessed rich man is neighbour to no-one. His moral values are embedded in his conversations with himself about the material world. He regards the land's produce as 'mine'.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong in wanting to enjoy the fruits of labour. The rich man's mistake lies in his myopic vision of abundance. Has he sown, tended and harvested his land without help? Hardly. So, his workers too should share the benefits of the harvest. Is grain so plentiful that other farmers have done equally well this year? Not necessarily. Like the time when there was grain in Egypt but not in Canaan [Genesis 41: 53ff]. he may only be able to relax because others must pay high prices.

This is the only one of Jesus' parables in which God appears – ominously, for he judges that the rich man is a fool – not only because others will enjoy the fruits of his labour once he is dead, but because he is essentially soulless. There is no-one else in his world. His god inhabits barns full of grain. He is content to live off material capital, with no social or spiritual reserves to draw on when crisis comes. Presumably the indiscriminate generosity of God means nothing to him. He is not fit for God's kingdom, and can expect to share the fate of another rich and selfish man in a later parable. [Luke 16: 19-31]

Prayer:

We pray for our world today.

We remember all those who have nothing but themselves and their lives: the refugees, the homeless, the destitute. We pray for all those who care for such people, that they may have the inner resource of God's love in their hearts at all times.

We pray for those who think that they are failures: the bankrupt, those who have dropped out, the lost.

We pray for them and for their families, that they may know that they are close to God's heart.

We pray for those who are angry today that their anger may be just – that they can take their anger and use it to right wrongs – that they can live with their anger and use it for God's kingdom.

We pray for those who are experiencing loss of their loved ones – and for those who have lost their material goods – that they may know how much they can live with, and without – and yet still be loved by God.

We pray for ourselves, acknowledging the hurts within, the pain and loss.

May we know the love of God in our lives always and pass that love to others who are hurting.

May God's love radiate out from our hearts as we give that love to the world. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, you spoke, and you brought hope, comfort and renewal – you touched, and you brought love, peace, healing and wholeness.

Come now, and speak again, bringing your word of life to all who suffer or are hurting.

Reach out afresh, bringing your touch of love to all whose hearts are aching and who cry out for help.

Where there is despair and turmoil, may your love renew.

Where there is pain and sickness, may your hand restore.

Lord Jesus Christ, you came once – you shall come again – but we ask you, come now and minister your grace, for your name's sake. Amen.

The words to 'Bind us together' written by Bob Gillman. Copyright 1977 ThankYou Music.

Songs of fellowship 43

Refrain: bind us together, Lord, bind us together, with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, bind us together with love.

1 There is only one God, there is only one King;

There is only one Body, that is why we sing:

Refrain.....

2 Made for the glory of God, purchased by his precious Son;

Born with the right to be clean, for Jesus the victory has won:

Refrain.....

3 You are the family of God, you are the promise divine;

You are God's chosen desire, you are the glorious new wine:

Refrain.....

Close:

Loving God, you have given us eyes to see the beauty and the bounty of the earth, and minds to understand the importance of sharing. As we go on into the week ahead, make us quick to see where there is injustice or suffering, and generous to do what we can to alleviate either.

And so we go now, assured of God's love: for Christ is all and in all.

We go assured of God's hand on our lives: for Christ is all and in all.

We go assured of God's blessing: and remaining in God's love. Amen.

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