

Friday (C.S. Lewis)

In Christian language, we believe that Christ will share his 'sonship' with us, will make us, like himself, 'Sons of God. Put that way, Christ offers everything for nothing. In a sense, the whole Christian life consists in accepting that very remarkable offer. But the difficulty is to reach the point of recognising that all we have done and can do is nothing. If you have really handed yourself over to him, it must follow that you are trying to obey him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing things in order to be saved, but because he has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of heaven is already inside you.

Scripture (Philippians 3:5-10)

In the matter of the Law, I was a Pharisee; as for religious fervour, I was a persecutor of the church; as for the uprightness embodied in the Law, I was faultless. But what were once my assets I now through Christ Jesus count as losses. Yes, I will go further: because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I count everything else as loss. For him I have accepted the loss of all other things, and look on them all as filth if only I could gain Christ and be given a place in him, with an uprightness from God based on faith.

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18th week of Ordinary Time

In God we trust, once we're secure.

The Parable of the Rich Man and his Barns, (Luke 12:13-21) is one of those passages that I feel comfortable with on the first read through, but become more uncomfortable with as I read into it and realise how much the rich man is me.

Although I don't have so much wealth that I have to 'upsized', I'm not sure that my attitude is significantly different. He has had a good year and, not unreasonably, he plans for the future rather than going on a big spending spree. If Jesus is criticising this, then I am worried, since I have insurance and don't have a problem with planning for a rainy day. However, Jesus is using the parable to illustrate the common attitude that our security rests in our possessions, which also confer status, and can be what gives life its meaning and sense of purpose if where we live, how we dress, the car we drive etc are what we strive for, including 'I do it to give my family every advantage'.

The man says to his soul, i.e. to the very ground of his being, 'take it easy, enjoy life – you've made it'. He is the self-made man now thinks that he is set for life: his security is in his food and goods. He has not only not signed up to 'give us this day our daily bread', he has forgotten that all comes from God, and it is in him we should put or trust, and look to for our fulfilment. Note how he only uses the words 'I' and 'mine'; if he had kept in mind that all was from God, he would realise that it is not just meant for him.

Then it all comes to nothing. The final question, 'Whose will the hoard be then?' challenges the listeners to ask, what becomes of all we've worked for? or, to put it another way, it challenges us to ask, 'What actually is the point of life?'

The author of Ecclesiastes doesn't seem to offer much comfort when he says 'all is vanity', (Eccl.1:2,2:21-23). However, he is using 'vanity' in the sense of transitory, like smoke. If you read all of chapters 1&2, it is clear that this man is worth listening to. He is a rich and learned man who sets out to discover what really matters in life. He examines hard work, wealth, pleasure, (with a serious investigation of drinking wine) and investigates wisdom and stupidity. He also your work bearing fruit in your descendants. All of these are found to be 'vanity'; they are transitory and hold no ultimate meaning.

He comes to the conclusion that we have to see things in their proper context – all comes from God, all is part of God's creation, part of his love – and to enjoy them as such, so that our security is in the God who provides, not in the things he provides.

Jesus' teaching about the rich man fits into this Wisdom stream. At this point of the Gospel he is preparing his followers for the opposition they will meet when they live in his way, and part of that opposition will be internal. They will be tempted to rely on their own resources (like other people do), rather than trust in God.

This parable challenges me to examine how much of my 'riches' are directed to my own comfort and security, and how much do I strive to make myself rich in the eyes of God? How much do I measure my wealth in terms of money, time to myself, being well thought of; how much I measure success by personal achievement and is? Before I can begin to answer that, I need to ask if I really believe that being rich in the eyes of God (living with the trust and freedom that 'Love God, Love neighbour' entails, is more desirable than certainty and comfort. The question is do I want to build bigger barns for myself or to be part of building God's Kingdom? Martin Bennett

Monday (Henri Nouwen)

The great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time. While running from one event to the next, we wonder in our innermost selves if anything is really happening. We are not sure that it would make any difference at all. In short, while our lives are full, we are unfulfilled. Jesus responds to this. He wants to bring us to the place where we belong. But his call to lead a spiritual life can only be heard when we are willing honestly to confess our wandering and worrying existence and recognise its fragmenting effect on our daily life.

Scripture (Ecclesiastes 1:16-17, 2:1, 4:8-11, 24-25)

I thought to myself: I have acquired a greater stock of wisdom than anyone before me in Jerusalem. I have applied myself to understanding philosophy and science, stupidity and folly, and I realise that all this too is chasing the wind. I thought to myself, 'Very well, I will try pleasure and see what enjoyment has to offer.' And this was futile too. I worked on a grand scale: built myself palaces, planted vineyards. I grew greater than anyone before me. I reflected on all that my hands had achieved. What futility it all was! there is no happiness except in eating and drinking and in enjoying one's achievements; and I see that this too comes from God's hand; for who could get anything to eat or drink, unless all this came from him?

Tuesday (Caryll Houselander)

Simplicity is not – as so many think and, alas, teach– silliness. The individual who is simple, who accepts themselves as they are, makes only a minimum demand on others in their relations with themselves. This simplicity not only endows one's own personality with unique beauty; it is also an act of real love. We cease to want to be rich, successful or popular, and want instead the things that satisfy our deeper instincts: to have time to see and wonder at the beauty of the earth, to love and be loved. The acceptance of life as it is must teach us trust and humility. If, in the light of this knowledge, we give ourselves unreservedly to life, every phase of it, every experience in it will lead us back to the inward heaven of spiritual childhood.

Scripture (Luke 12:16-21)

Then Jesus told them a parable. 'There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, "What am I to do? I do not have enough room to store my crops." The he said, "I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grains and goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time." But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul. And this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.

Wednesday Anthony de Mello, SJ)

A rich businessman was horrified to find the fisherman sitting by his boat, smoking a pipe. "Why aren't you fishing?" he asked. "Because I have caught enough for today," replied the fisherman. "Why don't you catch some more?" "What would I do with them?" asked the fisherman. "You could make more money, buy a moter for your boat, go out to deeper waters and catch more. The you could make more money, and afford to buy nets amd catch more, then make more money. Soon you would have enough to buy two boats and catch even more. Then you would be rich like me." What could I do then?" asked the fisherman. The businessman said, then you could really enjoy life." "What do you think I'm doing right now?" asked the fisherman.

Scripture (Matthew 6:32-34)

Do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the pagans who set their heart on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your heart on his Kingdom first, and all these things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Thursday (Thomas a Kempis)

The more closely a person is united to You in pure simplicity, the more varied and profound the matters which they understand without effort, for they receive light and understanding from heaven. A pure, simple and stable person, however busy and occupied, does not become distracted thereby, for they do all things to the glory of God, and strive to preserve themselves from all self-seeking. All perfection in this life is accompanied by a measure of imperfection, and all our knowledge contains an element of obscurity. A humble knowledge of oneself is a surere road to God than a deep searching of the sciences.

Scripture (1 John 2:15-17)

Do not love the world or what is in the world. If anyone does love the world the love of the Father finds no place in them, because everything there is in the world – the disordered bodily desires, disordered desires of the eyes, pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world, with all its disordered desires, is passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains for ever.