

## The Bigger Picture

A teacher asked his class this question,

“A wealthy man dies and leaves 10 million pounds.

1/5 goes to his wife, 1/5 goes to his son, 1/6 goes to his butler and the rest goes to charity.

Now, what does each get?”

After a very long silence in the classroom, Little Johnny raised his hand and said, "I think ma'am, a lawyer!"

We've perhaps been there before. And we can commiserate with the young man who shouted out to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." It doesn't seem like he's being unreasonable. It doesn't seem like it's wrong to ask for a fair distribution of one's inheritance... Then why does Jesus turn the man's request into a lesson on greed? Why turn the man's cry for justice into a sermon on stewardship?

This morning's lectionary readings give us the opportunity to reflect on and address that question. They are passages that help us grapple with the value and importance of Christian Stewardship.

In our morning fellowship, on Tuesday we reflected on the country of Japan, and we were informed that every year in Japan there are 30,000 deaths due to suicide. Japan is the world's third biggest economy and much of it is based on electronics and technology and the entertainment industry. This is to make people happy feel through gadgets. But the sad truth that we discovered about Japan is that it's one of the unhappiest places to live in the world.

Japan's own leaders call it “a super power without a moral compass” most notable amongst young people, who struggle with particular challenges such as social phobia and social anxiety. Materialism is still very much on the rise and less than 10 percent believe in a God who is concerned for them. Christians are a tiny minority in a society where consensus and conformity are important. 24 cities in Japan have no church at all. 85% of

Japanese young people wonder why they exist at all and 11% wish they had never been born. All these facts have come from Operation World which is a Christian charity. The point I'm making is that materialism does not bring peace and wholeness.

The people of Japan are a people without a moral compass. Are we any better here in the West? Have we a moral compass? What is our moral compass? I would like to think the teachings and the person of Jesus are a compass.

If we are out on the hill and the mist comes down, it's so easy to lose our bearings. The way ahead that we knew so well has gone and we become disorientated. How good it is to trust in a compass, to find magnetic north and get our bearings from there.

For Christians, Jesus is our compass in life.

In our reading today, from Luke's gospel, Jesus introduces us to a man without a moral compass; a man who is living entirely for himself.

This man is a wealthy landowner and farmer, and in the midst of life, he said, "I haven't anywhere to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do, I will build bigger barns and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

This farmer's life has been blessed, his business is thriving, and he is planning for his long retirement, but in the midst of life, at his peak, God calls to him, and he has to surrender everything. Not one thing can he take with him into eternity!

His material goods, his retirement plan, all that he worked so hard for, disintegrate; as he leaves this life and moves beyond, he can't take anything with him. His compass didn't point to God!

God said to him, "You fool, this very night you will have to give up your life and who will get all these things that you kept for yourself."

It's a sad story, but a story that gets to the heart of the human condition, a story about human greed and a story that goes on to tell us, that there is another way to live our lives.

One of the greatest problems that humans face is greed. Whether that is at a personal level or an international level, greed is always the root of problems.

*“Money, money, money  
Must be funny  
In the rich man's world  
Money, money, money  
Always sunny  
In the rich man's world  
Aha-ahaaa  
All the things I could do  
If I had a little money  
It's a rich man's world”*

sings ABBA, but the truth is, according to the Bible, that the love of money is the root of all evil. 1 Tim 6 v10. Not money....Money is not the root of all evil.... but the love of money is the root, and that is what our parable and our reading is all about today. Money can be used to help others and to build God's Kingdom.

This parable is about someone who has placed his trust in the wrong priorities. His compass is pointing in the wrong direction. He is trusting in his wealth.

It's worth noting that materialism and greed are not new things. It was also a first century problem and Jesus identified a problem within his society – greed.

He is responding to an argument about inheritance.

How many family disputes have been about inheritance? How many splits have been about who gets what? How many wars have there been about human greed? What we are seeing in Ukraine today has greed at its core. Another country wanting what's not theirs, so let's attack them and cause pain and misery; let's force them into submission. The Tenth Commandment “Do not covet”, is written large all over this war.

So, in this little parable, we discover the wealthy farmer, was only concerned about what he could get out of life – not what he could put back in. He was consumed with his own selfish and greedy desires.

The personal pronoun, I and me is used 10 times in one statement. He cannot see beyond his own situation and so he is bringing judgement on himself. He has no concept of the bigger picture. He has no concept of God, for if he had then he would have thought, about using his gains, as God would want him to do to help others. He is only wanting what is best for Number 1, to store the surplus. But sharing is not in his thinking and Jesus spotlights his greed. His compass points inward and not Godward.

His cup was certainly running over, with material blessings, but it wasn't running over to bring blessings to others.

He was confident that everything was going according to his plan.

But this man fell into a deadly trap. His material blessings became his God and his sole reason for living.

V17, "He began to think to himself..." This is his trap, he became insular in his thinking, his thoughts turned inward and not Godward.

I'm reading a book at the moment called "If God – then what?" It is a book of apologetics – arguing the case for God written by a young honest British man. He asks the question...If God – then what? A question that the farmer didn't ask.

In his book, he addresses a lot of the traditional responses to the existence of God and his conclusion in the book is this "For a long time, I had thought that Jesus was just piling up things I had to do, in order to get accepted by God. But I don't think that any more. I now realise that he was telling me that love for God, like marriage, involved me leaving the old life behind, trusting the other person completely, holding nothing back, taking on a new identity, and giving up everything for the sake of the only One who mattered. So that's what I did. You?" That's how his book ends.

Loving God is the simple answer to human greed. It is about our relationship with God, trusting him and doing so, by going forward in faith

and this is Jesus' remedy to greed. This is where we find our moral compass. He calls us to come and follow him. To walk in his ways.

This is not an easy passage, and one that will challenge our 21<sup>st</sup> century living, but one that is essential for us all; if we are to follow Christ.

Through Jesus, God offers us an alternative way to live. He offers us another way. A way that puts materialism into a context that involves God.

Jesus offers us a way that puts God's Kingdom first and not our kingdom.

He asks the question, What kind of Kingdom are we building?

If you like, this is the other side of the coin. The side of greed is all about putting self first. The other side is about putting God first.

He finishes our reading today by saying. "Be concerned with his Kingdom and he will provide you with all these things."

Jesus' way is a reversal of our human way of thinking.

He knows that true riches do not come in the form of material goods, but true riches come in the form of serving God and others.

If God - then what? - and it's a good question and a question that Christians and followers of Jesus should hold in their minds at all time.

If God - then what? If God is real then what?

If God is our Creator, then what?

If God is our judge, then what?

What does he expect of us?

If God is real and he really came to earth in Jesus, then what?

If God is with us now through the Holy Spirit – then what?

Well, from v22-31, Jesus give us a picture of someone who trusts in God.

It gives us the other side of the story, the other side of the coin, what believing and trusting in God really looks like.

It involves not worrying about the daily necessities of life. It involves trusting God for all things.

He said, "Don't be upset and always concerned about what you will eat or drink. For the unbelievers of this world, are always concerned about these things. Your Father knows that you need these things. Instead, be concerned with his kingdom, and he will provide you with these things."

Here is the secret of contentment.

True success in life is found in our relationship with Jesus Christ. True success is found when we take the words, "if God - then what" – to heart.

The one who lives in God's kingdom and builds up God's treasure has nothing to fear. Jesus therefore underlines the importance of trusting God.

He pleads with his disciples, to observe nature, and to understand that God is in the business of caring for people's needs, and that by doing so, he models how we are to care for others. The world fights and worries about territory, power and control; while God feeds the ravens, clothes the lilies and gives splendour to grass.

The secret to all this is to realise, that what we have, what we own, is first and foremost a gift from God. Everything we have is from God and to God it will return. God has entrusted us with His blessings, and he invites us to be wise stewards like Him and share what we have with others.

For we just don't know when God will call us.

At the most unexpected time, God comes knocking and in the words of Jesus, *You fool, This very night you will have to give up your life. Who will get all these things you have kept for yourselves?*

So, Jesus doesn't miss the mark with the man asking the question about inheritance and the short answer to this question is that he encourages his disciples to put God and his Kingdom first in their lives and everything that they need for now and all eternity shall be added.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen