

Pentecost 11 – Wesley 9am & 10.30am – 4<sup>th</sup> August 2013

Reading: Luke 12: 13-21 'The Parable of the Rich Fool'

Theme: 'Sometimes our thinking is foolish and we need reminding of that fact.'

### Introduction

It's that time of the year where we do our tax and I wanted to talk about the future and a retirement plan with my accountant/financial advisor. As a minister that is a bit of a joke as the assets are minimal and the possibilities for the future slightly restricted, but it is still a good idea to talk in hypotheticals!

My financial planner says to me; 'So, how many years do you expect to live?' 'Good question' I reply, 'Hopefully long enough to enjoy a good retirement and spend some of my kid's meagre inheritance'. Well says my financial advisor, 'Listen to me, my job is to ensure you make wise choices so that you will have a secure retirement.'

With that he pulls out a stack of charts and graphs, most which are totally meaningless to me. He tells me about bonds and stocks to buy and concludes with the fateful words: 'You have nothing to worry about. You are fixed up for the future. I'll look after you. Congratulations!'

This fictitious conversation was about four years ago. I go back to him some two years later and say: 'What's happened to my accumulated savings that have dipped by 30%, and my retirement now?' He responds: 'Hey look. All we can do is make some predictions, some educated guesses. Trying to figure out the market is a bit hit and miss. Sorry, but you've missed! You'll need to work for another decade, at least!' So much for centring on wealth accumulation for a nice retirement! Jesus has a bit to say about this in today's Gospel.

### The text: Luke 12: 13 -21

There are two parts to this passage:

- Luke 12: 13-15 'The question of an inheritance'
- Luke 12: 16- 21 'The parable of the rich fool'

It was common in Jesus' time for rabbi's to be asked to settle inheritance issues. Hence this is not an unusual occurrence. However, Jesus turns the question back on the individual, to look initially at his own motives before moving on to a parable, a story with a distinct meaning, in this instance centring on the 'abundance of a person's possessions' thereby answering the man's original question. Initially Jesus says two things. Firstly, I'm not your arbitrator. You need to sort this out with your brother. In a sense he is saying, this is a relational thing and not a legal matter. Talk it through and settle it amicably so your relationship

may continue. The family courts probably wouldn't have the back-log today that they have if people heeded Jesus' encouragement to communicate, problem solve and work through your family issues! Secondly he says to the man asking the inheritance question, beware of greed for your life does not consist of accumulating possessions. Here is further teaching for us today in an incredibly acquisitive, accumulating type of society that we live in, here in Australia. I know that much of what I have I really don't need, yet I still acquire 'stuff' that flows out of cupboards.

So Jesus goes on to tell the parable of the 'rich fool'. The use of the word 'fool' is different to our usage today. In Israel's wisdom teaching 'foolishness' is not merely the stupidity we think of when the word is used. Rather foolishness is the arrogant, obstinate disregard for God. We need to keep that meaning in mind as we read this parable.

Jesus over-emphasises the self-centredness of the rich man. Life revolved purely around himself. Listen to the parable again:

“...a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and all my goods. And I will say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy: eat drink and be merry.’”

Fifteen, 'I's, my's, etc occur in just a couple of verses. Totally ego-centric with no thought for others, let alone God.

Here is the foolishness of the rich man. He thinks that he can control his destiny because of all he has. However God says:

“You fool!!! This very night your life will be demanded from you.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

Amazingly Jesus is not having a go at rich people. He had friends who were wealthy and supported him and his disciples. It is rather how people use their wealth and what their priorities in life are that is the point of Jesus' teaching. Looking beyond yourselves to others is so important and having God central to your being is of primary importance.

Last Sunday in the Gospel lesson from Luke 11 where Jesus is asked to teach the disciples to pray, Jesus' pray is God at the centre, our request should be for enough food to survive each day and for us to be in a spiritual relationship with God so we know our sins are forgiven and we forgive others. The spiritual is so important.

## For the Wesley 10.30am service

In a moment we will participate together in the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion. What we have on the table is a small quantity of bread and wine. You are invited to have a morsel from that small amount of bread and a sip from the cup of wine. It is minimal. By the world's standards this is not a meal; it is a travesty. This is not the way to eat, drink and be merry! Yet we do! This is the ultimate celebration because here we are nourished by Christ himself. Here we are staggeringly wealthy. It is the food of heaven which reminds us of God's love, care and nourishment spiritually, for each and every one of us.

## Conclusion

The parable ends on a sombre note reminding the listeners not to be like the rich fool who forgot about God and ended life with nothing spiritual at all.

In his reflection BIG BARNs on this passage Bruce Prewer writes:

'A sad day. Poor big Josh. Heart. Unexpected. Hard on the wife & kids.' 'Yeah. But honestly mate, in his long-ranging plans, the family never rated much; too busy on his barns.'

'You're right there. The old coot was always so strong willed. Never had a holiday. Always more barns to build.'

'You know that far corner scrub of his, the red sand where the wildflowers grow? Well he called that useless land.'

'That was big Josh. No time for trees and wildflowers or God; women's stuff, he reckoned. But he'd scheme barns for hours.'

'His wife plays the piano beautifully they say and his kids are great on the footy field. You know he never listened to his wife's playing or saw the kids on the footy field or was interested in others.'

'Pity. But let us give credit where it is due: he built the biggest barns between here and Timbuktoo!' (slight changes made!)

## Prayer

Lord, forgive us when we love the material blessings you give us more than we love you. Forgive us when we trust the stuff we have accumulated more than we trust you. Forgive us when we sacrifice too much well-being and neglect the important matters of life – the spiritual. Come to us afresh with the promised gift of your Holy Spirit and re-align our thinking to Christ's teaching. Challenge us today to better use our ample resources for the well-being of all. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.