

**Luke 12: 16-21 (22-30) 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15 – Rich Fool**  
**Harvest Sunday 1 October 2023 - PRINTED**

The farmer in Jesus' parable is traditionally known as 'the rich fool,' and fool he was – but in today's society he might be considered a hero. Think of all the yield on his land! Think of the profit! Isn't that what you farm for? – what you go into business for? And when you've worked hard, don't you deserve a break, a happy retirement in the sun? It's what our society dreams of, surely?! But if this is heroism, it's a sad day for us all. Listen to his language, all about 'my land, my crops, my barns.' Listen to how often the word 'I' appears: 'What shall I do? I have no place... I'll do this. I will tear down and I will build...' No one else – no family, no friends, just me! Selfishness leaves him on his own. God says, 'You fool.' And I'm sure God says to us today when we get greedy, 'You fools. You're killing off your own spirit.'

St Paul suggests an opposite way of living, one characterised by generosity. Although the passage may sound quite abstract, the context is concrete: an appeal to the Christians in Corinth to support a collection for people in Jerusalem who have been hit by famine. As he does so, he invokes higher principles, beginning and ending with the generosity of God. Paul's is a whole different perspective on life. Whereas most people, whether in the Corinth of his day, the Palestine of Jesus' times, or in our world today, instinctively measure the success of their lives with symbols of wealth (for us, house, car, holidays and so on), for him the measure of success is in praise to God. If you're generous, and neither begrudging your generosity nor blowing your own trumpet, then others will notice, and there'll be an overflowing of expressions of thanks to God. The fruit of a good life is the thanksgiving that comes from generosity. And God loves a cheerful giver.

The farmer in Jesus' story needs a change of perspective, right from the start. He only thought of himself, but the parable begins with the ground (or the land, or the soil) which produced the crops. Land is the gift of God. Go back to Genesis: on the third day of creation, God divides the waters, providing the solid ground in which all things can grow. In Deuteronomy, before entering the Promised Land, the people are told, 'Take some of the first fruits of all that you will produce from *the soil* of the *land* that the Lord your God is giving you.' Soil too is a gift of God.

And soil is amazing! It's essential to life on earth. It's the mechanism for the cycle of life: out of death and decay of vegetable matter, new life is born. I've been fascinated to learn how the earth worm is the principal mover in this cycle. Extraordinary underground engineers, worms recycle organic waste, turning refuse into nutrient rich soil, making the soil porous so water doesn't lie on the surface, and allowing oxygen into the soil to get around plant roots. How can we take such work for granted? But the farmer's lack of interest has been typical over the centuries, so that we end up with our modern predicament.

Environmentalist Edward Davey writes: 'We have gravely mismanaged the world's soils, an estimated third of which are now moderately to highly degraded due to nutrient depletion, chemical pollution and compaction. Each year, the world loses some 24 billion tons of

fertile soil as a result of the way we farm and manage our environment. The earth cannot afford to continue like this.' Soil is to be treasured, not just to be stamped on, or treated merely as an investment opportunity.

As we notice the soil, so too we should notice the crops that grow. The rich farmer could only value them for the promised monetary gain, but there's so much more to it than that. In the Genesis account, God having separated the waters on the third day so that dry land might appear, then decrees there should be vegetation on that land: 'Let the earth grow green with grass, plants yielding seed, fruit trees bearing fruit, each according to its kind' – an infinite variety and wonder in creation. God is not miserly in his creation. God delights in richness and growth and abundance – a fecundity in the heart of God! You know this if you successfully grow vegetables from seed: suddenly you can find yourself with far more than you need – masses of tomatoes or beans or courgettes – and most are quick to share with others. The farmer in the story should not have thought himself so clever in producing such a crop.

Fields of wheat and barley are not simply for food or profit. They are part of an eco-system, and provide habitats for insects, birds and animals, elements of the extraordinary biodiversity of the planet. Taking the attitude that farming is only about maximising yield, has ultimately led to the loss of such biodiversity, which, today, in the view of many scientists, is so great we are heading towards an era of mass extinction. As King Charles (when Prince of Wales) has said, 'Humanity is less than humanity without the whole of creation.' We need a change of perspective that values the plant and the tree, and the soil in which it grows.

We sing:

*Come ye thankful people, come;  
raise the song of harvest home.*

Jesus told many parables about farming – sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting, and sometimes of the time between. For farmers also know they have to wait for crops to germinate, sprout, grow, fruit and ripen. In matters of caring for the planet, negative actions decades ago are having effects today, and our actions today will affect generations to come. We need long-term perspectives. But by God's grace, good done now will be fruitful one day. And there will be a day of reckoning.

*For we alone are God's own field,  
fruit unto his praise to yield.*

So we ask ourselves, are we sowing sparingly or generously, because what will be harvested will be equally sparing or generous? We ask ourselves, are we storing things up for ourselves (in vain hope we can take them with us) or are we being rich towards God and the world God has given us to care for?

*For the Lord our God shall come,  
and shall take his harvest home.*