

Sunday, July 31st. 2022. Trinity 7

Ecclesiastes 1.2, 12-14, 2.18-23, Psalm 49.1-12, Luke 12.13-21

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There is a poem by William Wordsworth, "The World is too much with us", which begins:

The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;- Little we see in nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

The book Ecclesiastes is part of the wisdom literature of the OT. It reveals the limits of human understanding. The author never denies the sovereignty of God, but he does deny the ability of human beings to grasp the meaning of life. He begins the book by saying that all that makes up life soon vanishes; everything gained by work is left behind at death, and the only reward is the exhaustion, which it produces.

In Psalm 49, the psalmist begins by asking a question, "How can one maintain trust in God when the wicked prosper and use their power to exploit the weak?" This thought occurs also in Psalm 73:

'For I was envious of the proud; I saw the wicked in such prosperity; For they suffer no pains and their bodies are sleek and sound; they come to no misfortune like other folk; nor are they plagued as others are.'

With a revelation from God, he has received an answer. All suffer the same fate in the end. A multimillionaire cannot buy escape from death. Death, the great leveller, makes all people equal.

When we are thinking about wealth and possessions, we often say, "You can't take it with you." Back in 1989, I helped with the interregnum at Wingrave, Cublington and Aston Abbots, and at the end, the churchwardens invited my mum and me to a meal. I went back home to fetch the camera and discovered that we had been burgled. My mum didn't react and said, "It's only possessions."

The parable of the rich fool is found only in Luke's Gospel. The older son of two received two thirds of the father's inheritance. The implication is that he hadn't divided it with his brother. Jesus refuses to be drawn into an argument, but warns in a parable about coveting wealth and possessions.

There is no mention in the parable of the man's effort; he is the landowner and he has become rich. His attitude is all about me, me, me. 'What should I do?' 'I have no place to store **my** crops', 'I will pull down

my barns and build larger ones.' Then **I** shall have a comfortable retirement.' In the end, he is required to die and his possessions are of no avail. His soul is not his; it belongs to God, and that night God demands it of him.

By this Jesus shows his listeners that we have to live in a different way, to live by different values and to display the love, patience, understanding and forgiveness of God. That is what it means by saying that we are in the world, but not of it.

However, it is not a matter of seeing the world as evil, being narrow-minded, crabby or carping. It is a matter of transforming it by the way we live and by loving others, as God loves us. In this way we may discover what true life is, breaking down barriers, making new friends, helping to make other people's lives better. If we can get that balance right, we shall be happier, too.

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