Trinity 7C - Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; Colossians 3: 1-11; Luke 12: 13-21

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. The beginning of the Old Testament reading this morning sort of sums up everything that comes after it.

First there was the iPod, and then there was the iPad and the iPhone, and now there is pretty well iAnything.

The parable we heard in the gospel reading is often referred to as the parable of the rich fool. And one commentator I read called him a poor fool, which might be nearer the mark. I’m not sure I would call him a fool at all, but he certainly had an iProblem.

You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.

Here’s a serious question: why did Jesus even need to tell this parable? He gives us the punch line even before the story: Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. And then he goes on to tell the parable itself. We expect to hear a story that will prove his point, a story about someone who’s very very greedy. But the man in Jesus’ story is not a bad man. There is no proof that he acquired his land illegally or that he exploited his workers. Jesus says nothing about the man raiding the lands of the poor people in order to raise his own crops. Just this one simple sentence: The land of a rich man produced abundantly.

I waxed lyrical about the farmland we saw in France a couple of weeks ago. It’s a wonderful thing when land produces abundantly: when there’s the right amount of rain at the right time, and the right amount of sunshine and warmth to ripen it all.

The rich man’s land produced abundantly. Some in the crowd might well have been saying to themselves: He must be a very devout man. They would have known the bit in Deuteronomy that says: You shall obey the Lord, observing all his commandments, and the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings …

But that wasn’t all there was to the parable, and Jesus lets the landowner speak for himself: What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

What should I do? I will do this. I will pull down. I will build. I will store. I-I-I-I – I. This man’s world is so small that he talks solely to himself. What should I do? he asks; but he isn’t asking anybody else. He answers his own question: These are MY crops...MY barns...MY grain...MY goods. He has no connections beyond himself. He has no awareness of God, who instructed the people of Israel to leave grain at the edges of the field for sojourners and widows, the so-called ‘gleanings’.

He can’t see beyond the edges of his own fields, and nor does he wonder if – or why – or where - there are people who have no grain or food at all. This man is completely isolated in a world he has created for himself. The land is his. The barns are his. The grain is his and the goods are his. He has no neighbour. (he thinks) He has no need of God. (he thinks) The only words he speaks that sound like a prayer are the words he says to himself. And I said to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’

But what he could not know – because only God knows the number of our days – is that there would not **be** many years -- there wouldn’t be even one more morning. You fool! said God: This very night your life is being demanded of you.

God didn’t call the man a fool because he was affluent or productive, but because he had disappeared inside his own distorted view of the world. My barns and crops; my grain and goods -- how meaningless will that be, come the morning.

Talking to himself was not enough. Talking to **our**selves is not enough. Following Jesus calls us beyond ourselves to other people – and that call inevitably has economic implications. This whole section of Luke’s gospel is about the particular economy of God. Jesus summarizes it by saying: For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Wherever he went, Jesus called people beyond the M word: MY crops, MY grain, MY barns, MY bank balance, MY possessions. Jesus knew it would be terribly difficult for people. And it still is. Seeing beyond our own interests is every bit as difficult in our own times.

There was a hoo-ha not long ago about benefit payments for the disabled - and clearly there will always be those who try to cheat the system - but it meant yet more form-filling for Chris and me on behalf of Dan, who couldn’t then, can’t now and won’t ever be able to work in their definition of the word - and the outcome was that some of those who genuinely are not able to work were denied money to live by. And of course it is reasonable that we should have systems in place and work requirements. But according to genuine ability or not to do it. We mustn’t let legislators make decisions in a vacuum, isolated from the very people whose lives they are influencing. Jesus is calling us to see beyond the borders of our fields or bank accounts or employment. He isn’t trying to bully us; but he **is** trying to give us a vision of what a **truly** abundant life might look like.

This tragic tale of the Rich Fool isn’t a reminder that we might die sooner than we hoped; nor that we might find ourselves wishing that we had spent more time with our children and less at the office (although those can be useful lessons). This parable is digging deeper than that. It’s talking about money’s ability to impoverish our souls and twist our values. It is warning us against greed, acquisitiveness, and preoccupation with self. It offers an explanation for why otherwise good and hard-working people might end up existing in their own self-absorbed little bubbles. Forgetting about people they can’t see. Or don’t have to see. Or don’t want to see.

I think, quite simply, this parable is saying that greed is idolatry. The man in the parable has chosen to live in a world of one.  Talking to himself about the pleasures he can enjoy shows that no one else matters to him. Back to where we started: he has an I problem.

And don’t forget the man who prompts the parable in the first place, who shouts out from the crowd, trying to get Jesus to help him to get part of the family inheritance. He really seems to be asking Jesus to validate his own desire for wealth.

And remember that passage from the letter to the Colossians that we also heard this morning: Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: and then there’s a list which concludes with: and greed (which is idolatry).

Greed encourages us to avoid anyone who looks like they might threaten whatever we see as ours. And this greed-idolatry constructs worldviews in which self-interest is actually the cardinal virtue. Idolatry fibs: telling us it won’t diminish our capacity for the common good, that which benefits more than just ourselves.

Don’t get me wrong – I am not calling hellfire and brimstone to rain down on us all. But in little ways, we each have a rich fool inside us. What we need to remember is what we say at the offertory more weeks than not: God, all things come from you.

God is a rich and generous and loving God, who wants to bring his children up to be like Him.

**Amen**