

Pentecost 10 5th August 2007,

Rev. Rob Lamerton

- Hosea 11:1-11
- Psalm 107:1-9,43
- Colossians 3:1-11
- Luke 12:13-21

Text of readings is available at

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/CPentecost/cProper12.htm>

My mum used to remind me that "the best things in life are free," especially when I wanted something! I heard that song on the radio last night. It speaks about the moon and the stars, etc. On my morning walk, I do give thanks for the moon, the frost, the light coming out on Mount Ainslie, the trees, the magpies ...

but I wonder if I would enjoy these things so much if I had to

... wonder about where to find my next meal,
... be concerned about the security of my home,
... be anxious about the quality of water I get,
... or about health care or income,

or be careful about the company I keep for fear that I might be thrown into prison or worse, or if I could not worship freely in the way that I choose.

There are indeed many things that we take for granted: national security and peace, healthcare, welfare, sanitation, police and justice, the fixing of wages, etc. These things give us the basis — the sound structures — that allow us to enjoy the other things that life offers. They may not be as good as we might like — there is always room for improvement — but we would find it difficult without them. They are part of the accepted fabric and structure of our society and without them we would be living on our wits, day by day.

Of course none of these things are free; they cost us in various ways — in taxes, in behaviour and attitudes, in our contribution to making them work for us, in our commitment to change where it is needed, in our commitment to doing our work.

I encourage you to think of all these things as part of being rich towards God — knowing God and therefore participating in giving value to society and community.

The man in the gospel story had it all, but because he had lost sight of God and his own mortality, he was deluded into believing that he had control even of life itself. He was sadly mistaken! All that he had would now belong to someone else. His efforts seemingly were in vain. Had he been right towards God, he might have made different choices about sharing his wealth and using it to benefit his employees and his community.

Sadly, some who claim to be rich in God's ways believe it to be OK to accumulate wealth. Yet there are those with no professed faith who seem to live out the values that Jesus taught. To be rich toward God is to do something about sharing the blessings that God gives.

The prophet Hosea preached to an Israel suffering as a result of war with the Assyria. We read of the unfaithfulness, the 'whoredom' of God's people:

the sword rages in those cities,
it consumes the oracle-priests,

and devours because of their schemes.

My people are bent on turning away from me (vv.6-7a)

This after God had loved and nurtured them.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. (vv. 1-4a)

God's response, according to Hosea, is a passionate desire to be reunited:

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; by compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. (vv.8-9)

(I think Hosea is reflecting his own love for his unfaithful wife as he ponders God's ways.) At the heart of the story is a poverty toward God, in which national leaders can be killed and social structures fail.

Last night, I heard Richard Carter speak about the violence in the Solomons. It grew gradually. Because nobody believed it would happen, nobody put a stop to it until it was too late!

Paul speaks about the need for healthy relationships within the church at Colossae (and the church generally!) and the putting to death of earthly things that damage and destroy. As well as the greater issues, he insists on putting on of new behaviours and attitudes, in the same way that Christians were clothed with a robe at their baptism.

... seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator (vv. 9b-10)

If nothing else, Paul's words are about developing Christian community — developing behaviours creative of a community in which division over race, culture, and social status is put aside and where people find healing and strength — where there is no longer division, but Christ is all in all.

If anyone expresses richness toward God, it is Jesus Christ! The riches we have towards God in Christ are about building a rich and strong Christian community and at the same time enriching the fabric of our secular society, for it too is ultimately the focus of God's great and passionate love.

The best things in life, it seems, are not free but come from a desire to use God's gifts and apply them for the greatest benefit.