

*A radical new way of thinking.*

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

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We live in interesting times. The optimism at the end of the last century, the end of the Cold War, and renewed engagement with China seem like a dream, the ideals of democracy were, it seemed, in the ascendancy. Few of us would have predicted the world that now live in, with its autocratic regimes and de facto Cold Wars. Democracy has proven to be a fragile idea, one that must be nurtured, even in the great democracies of our world.

Among the many marks of democracy is the idea of a contract, or better a covenant. We live in a covenant with one another, with those who have gone before us and with those who come after us. Some of the issues of our day, our environment, reconciliation, economic equity are questions that many of us will not see resolved, we will not see the outcome of decisions made today by our governments. This idea is reflected in our idea of church, this body which transcends time and place and which comprises potentially of all who live and who have lived and will live.

There is something very unnerving about the autocrats that seem to abound in our day. Among other things there seems an unwillingness to engage with death, at least not their own. The leaders of China, Russia and North Korea for example all seem to have that same look, the psalmist would comment upon their fat smooth faces and gleaming eyes! They enjoy wealth far beyond the imagining of their peoples and they have appointed themselves as leaders for ever, there seems to be no narrative of succession. Indeed, many simply want to emulate the past, cast themselves as the new Peter the Great, or the new Mao Zedong. No doubt there are plans for mausoleums to be built so that like some of their predecessors they can be embalmed and laid out for generations to come to view them, revere them and celebrate their lives. Today we are asked to consider our succession, what are we working towards? To what end?

The teacher of Ecclesiastes takes rather a pessimistic view of it all. 'I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me—and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish?' It makes for good reading but is a great example of the need for a holistic reading of scriptures. We can't, mustn't, read Ecclesiastes in isolation. I have often heard the passage from Ecclesiastes about time—you might remember it: a time to live and a time to die, a time for war and peace etc., etc, read at funerals. It seems that quite often the thinking behind it suggests that we have the ability to set our own timeframes. But I think quite the opposite is being said and today's gospel rather bears that out. Times are not ours to know, but what is in our power is to be prepared for the kingdom of God. That is what Paul is calling for in this passage we heard from Colossians. Paul is calling for a radical new way of thinking, a way of living that is future focused. The key to this passage is at the end when Paul says that in this way of thinking barriers between us are broken down. The things that we are put aside in Paul's two lists are things that divide and create enmity, the antithesis of the Kingdom.

When we read the parable of the Rich Fool, as it is often called, we discover the antithesis of succession, of handing on, of the kingdom of God. Clearly the man's fields yield a bumper crop, no bad thing. The problem starts with that simple statement 'and he thought to himself,' this is where the trouble begins. He has no one with whom to converse, no one whose wisdom he seeks out, importantly: no one for whom he feels responsible, no one to whom he regards himself accountable. [I sense this is the autocrat writ large]. He is alone surrounded

by money and food and resources, but starved of people and of love. He works out a plan which further isolates himself from others and from God. I know, he says I'll build bigger barns and to celebrate he decides to hold a party. Eat, drink and be merry he says. He clearly did not know the end of that proverb . . . 'for tomorrow we die' it says in Isaiah! What we have presented to us is a grotesque parody of the kingdom! 'It's my party and I'll cry if I want to!' No God, no companions, no eternity. The rich man is a fool because he thinks he can insulate himself from God and other people, loneliness is his lot!

Today's readings remind us that we are simply stewards of all that we claim to own. Others have been stewards before us and others will come after us. In God, we live in a covenant with those folk; part of that requires of us that we follow a gospel imperative. We don't simply bury or store up that which we have been entrusted with, we invest in it, we actively participate in its growth that might hand on something that is a better fit for the kingdom. This is what Church is all about, this is why we gather. The rich fool envisages a parody of the Eucharist; whilst we take, bless, break and give, whilst we make the bold claims of unity with the Church throughout time and space, whilst we celebrate an ancient rite that propels us into the future, whilst we welcome allcomers, whilst we celebrate life and new life, the rich fool celebrates alone, and this is death.

The fool believes that his future is secured by his full barns. We know that our future is secured by the living out and handing on of our Eucharistic spirituality in which everyone is welcome to share in the abundance of the harvest. Amen.