

Sunday ? July 2022 [Joy] **Possessions**

I wonder how many of you have moved home recently, or, like me, enjoy watching programmes such as *Location, Location, Location* on the television. The people looking for new homes are often asked what are the key things they would hope to find in their new property, in order of importance. Usually they want more space to live in and accommodate all their possessions.

Our reading this morning starts with Jesus being approached by a man in the crowd which had been following him, to arbitrate in a dispute about an inheritance, probably including property. Jesus refuses to take sides but instead tells the crowd a parable. It's about a wealthy farmer who has been very successful and does not have the storage capacity he needs for his abundance of crops. He decides to build new and larger barns to store the crops and then sit back and take it easy.

The excessive nature of what we have in our homes was recognised as a problem many years ago by the architect of the British Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris. He wrote: *Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.* The message Jesus gives us is about how much we actually need as opposed to what we wish to focus our lives and desires on. What is our life all about, what makes us happy and how can we enhance the lives of others who might not be as fortunate as we are.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he describes the way we ought to try to live our lives. He says: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience ... Above all, clothe yourselves with love.* This does show us the values we should strive to achieve, but I think all of us have within us, to a certain extent, the desire to collect and hoard. For me, it is all about clothes. I have many clothes which I have had for over forty years, but still can't seem to part with, despite the fact I could probably not get into them anymore. Possessions bring with them problems of storage space and, for me, my running battle with clothes moths. As Jesus says: *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth where moth and rust consume.*

The issue, as in our parable this morning, is that all of us here have enough to eat and homes to live in, but for many people all over the world this is not the case. Even in our local communities we know that people are struggling to provide adequate meals for their families.

So what is the miracle that encapsulates this thought? You have probably guessed: from one child's packed lunch of five small rolls and two dried fish (think of sardines) more than five thousand are fed. And how did this miracle come about? As I have shared with you before, I don't think it was a miracle of multiplication; rather, it was the even greater miracle of people's consciences being stirred by the example of the small child giving everything that he had to Jesus. A child's FAITH beyond our adult sense of the rational. Look at the disciples' reaction to his gift: *What use is that among so many?*

Jesus could transform the situation – a miracle of inner change in the hearts and minds of the huge crowd which had followed him that day. A miracle of SHARING, as people get out the baskets of food which they had brought with them, but previously had been unwilling to share,

and offering food to those next to them in the crowd. How the world could be transformed if all of us would take this message to heart. There would be no poverty or starvation. What can truly make us happy is when we are prepared to share not just our possessions, but ourselves and our time with others. God shared his most precious possession with us by sending Jesus into the world. And Jesus by his teaching and example showed us what being part of God's family is all about. Our lives here and now are only a small part of being in God's kingdom; we have the hope of eternity.

Our possessions will have to be left behind when we move on into eternity, but our relationship with God, which we have just begun, will continue. This is what we should be looking towards, a hope that can never be destroyed.

I want to end with the first verse of the hymn we sang before I started to speak:

*O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee,
I give you back the life I owe
That in your ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be*

Joy Middleton