

Year C Creation 3, Proper 25 220918

Amos 8:4-7

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Luke 16: 1-13

What do we make of a gospel that seems to reward a corrupt manager? It is interesting that depending on what bible commentary I delve into, the title of this section changes. In one it is 'the parable of the unjust steward', in another, 'the parable of the dishonest steward', and in a third, the 'parable of the shrewd steward'. I think this latter title is the most accurate. In verse 8 Jesus calls the steward shrewd. He was shrewd with regard to what he cared about the most, which was money, and for avoiding a total personal catastrophe for himself.

With what I am sure is a heavy tone of irony, Jesus goes on to say that anyone who cares about something so insignificant as material wealth, surely those who have faith will be even more shrewd about matters of spiritual wealth, the riches of God's kingdom! Jesus completes this teaching by saying that you can't be devoted to both, you will love one and hate the other. Jesus is basically saying, it is make your mind up time.

In the social networks that priests inhabit there has been a lot of chat about how this gospel plays out when we have a nation in mourning for a monarch who had wealth beyond many peoples' imagination. My reflection is that the late Queen was never personally showy or wasteful of public or private wealth. Yes, at formal occasions and the big state occasions, she wore jewellery costing more than some people will earn in a lifetime, and the tables were groaning with the

best food and drink, but from what glimpses we had of 'normal life', the Queen and her family mostly liked fairly normal things – and yes, maybe the odd marmalade sandwich too.

And the late Queen was very clear about how her faith informed her life, the decisions she made, and how she treated everyone she came into contact with.

Our reading from 1 Timothy implores us to pray for 'kings and all in high positions' so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life. So many peoples comments over the last ten days about the queen spoke of her being a steady figurehead providing a sort of continuity above the fray of politics.

As we are in week three of the Season of Creation, I want to reflect on how our gospel reading may help and inform us.

On one reading of the gospel we can see that the steward was willing to forgo a benefit today – money – for a longer term good to come at a future date. Jesus commended him for being that shrewd in taking steps to guarantee his future.

So hopefully, you can see where I am going with this. Like the shrewd steward, our track record in terms of caring for God's creation, for being stewards of that creation, is collectively very poor. If we were to stand before the 'manager' and have to account for our stewardship, to account for all the manager had heard about our greed and disrespect for God's creation, what would be our version of the tactics the shrewd steward took?

In that situation I think I would look to provide evidence that of the two masters, I wanted to love and serve God and his creation, and not be a lover of greed, consumerism, consumption, and all things which dishonour God's creation. And as actions speak so much

louder than words, what could I point to that would show that my love of God's creation is my master?

Before I give you my simple list, I want to briefly talk about the concept of the circular economy. The circular economy is one where we:

- ✚ Eliminate waste and pollution
- ✚ Circulate products and materials to the fullest extent possible; through reuse, repair, recycle
- ✚ Regenerate nature

You will find a piece of paper in the pew with some headings on it. As I speak, and as I invite Sue Owen to speak after me, I want you to decide for each item whether it is: reduce, reuse, repair, or recycle. You may choose to write down what we offer into this space against each heading, so give you some ideas, or just put ticks in the appropriate columns against for each action we describe. You are invited to take the piece of paper home and write down all that you are currently doing, and make a few new commitments you chose to follow through with.

So, coming back to my list, you can probably guess some of what I might say, especially if you have been reading my monthly Rector's letter...

- ✚ A drastic cutting back of red meat in my diet, more plant-based food
- ✚ Using public transport as much as possible
- ✚ Cutting back on buying things wrapped in plastic (loose vegetables and fruit as far as possible).
- ✚ Cutting back on buying things in a plastic container (milk in bottles, taking containers to the Storehouse Refillery for pulses, detergent, clothes washing liquid and conditioner, buying bars of soap, shampoo and shaving cream)

- ✚ Buying seasonal food and food with low carbon miles
- ✚ Growing food myself, but nowhere near enough
- ✚ Not taking domestic flights and trying to reduce air travel – hard with a daughter living in USA
- ✚ Wearing more layers and limiting the house heating only to the rooms I am using, and at a lower temperature
- ✚ Driving at a lower speed, more fuel efficient

I also asked members of the congregation how they have made changes to reduce their carbon footprint. Many people came up with similar things to my list. I have asked Sue to say a few words about what she has done.

Sue...

So, I hope you have filled out your piece of paper with ticks or a list of ideas. I hope that you can create your own affirming list of what you have done to reduce your carbon footprint, and help take forward the circular economy, and maybe add some things you now feel inspired to do.

We need to acknowledge that a few people doing these things won't make any difference, whilst a popular citizen-led change would make a significant and positive impact. At the psalm writing workshop yesterday we categorised the issues as:

- ✚ The big and hard things (coloured red)
- ✚ What we can individually do, but on its own it won't be enough (coloured orange)
- ✚ Truly transformative action (coloured green)

To end with I thought I would offer a few statistics which interested me this last week:

Did you know that:

- ✚ An electric drill is used on average for 13 minutes in its life.
- ✚ In a survey of 100,000 UK homes, 66 items of single-use plastic packaging were used each week = 3,432 per annum.
- ✚ Your diet should contain no more than 20% as protein to maintain your weight; that is about 0.75g per kg of weight, so 52.5g a day if you wight 70 kg/11 stones in old money.
- ✚ Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to health in the UK. 28,000 to 36,000 deaths per annum are attributed to long-term exposure.
- ✚ In the UK despite the 5p tax on plastic bags over 1.5 bn were bought last year, that one per household per week!

As we enter a new Carolean age, with Charles III as our monarch, a man who was derided over thirty years ago for his ideas about the environment and ecology, let us as our epistle urges us to do, pray for the King and also for all those in high positions, especially in the newly formed cabinet in Westminster, to do what is right and acceptable before God, and help transform our society, and may we pray that we may become good or even better stewards of God's earth.