

Eleventh Sunday of Pentecost 31 July 2016

[Hosea 11: 1-11; Psalm 107: 1-9, 43; Colossians 3: 1-11; Luke 12:13-21](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 13C / Ordinary 18C / Pentecost +11 Jul 31, 2016](#) from Textweek

The starting point for a sermon is often spelled out on the front page of the service sheet; for the service sheet needs to be prepared early in the week and so reflects an early encounter with readings.

As you can readily see, this week's encounter with the readings settled on two lines from the gospel, and looked at a comparison with the 'reality of life' here in Australia; and it began to unfold the whole phenomenon of 'greed'. Since writing that first short snap-shot for the front cover of the service sheet it feels like dozens of sermons have formed, to the point of thinking that a book rather than a sermon might be an appropriate outcome.

By Friday this week the thought of not preaching at all became a real option, for do we really want to hear what is being revealed in the gospel?

And in turn, that thought led to a contemplation of 'priesthood' and of what we want and expect from our priest.

Do we want to hear, and have confirmed, that everything is OK, and that we're alright and that we're safe; in church terms do we want to know that 'we're saved'?

Or, do we want to be challenged, enlightened and opened to a new understanding and appreciation of life as revealed in Christ?

I'm not sure; but it does seem to me that for most of its history the Church and its priesthood have opted for the former rather than the latter of those two options.

And perhaps it was that contemplation that suggested that the idea of not preaching might be a dramatic way of illustrating a couple of very real issues: firstly, that the gospel reading, and accompanying readings speak for themselves, and we are after all, better educated and more well-read than earlier church communities and so perhaps are no longer so dependent on a priest opening up the word of God for us. And secondly; do we actually hear what a sermon speaks of, or do we actually hear what we want to hear; and so perhaps the silence of a pause in preaching might be enabling for us to listen for ourselves.

Anyway, by Saturday the encounter with the readings through the week had now generated a seemingly infinite number of starting points, and so demanded a deeper and closer look at the thread that was still seeking to emerge.

That process of deeper looking and 'listening' brought to light a stunning piece of writing that very much echoed with many of the still unformed sermons that were gestating.

And so with some editing to crop the overall size that piece of writing is our sermon for today.

And by way of introduction, let's just consider a very brief summary of the readings that we have heard.

Hosea provides a delightful reflection on the intimate relationship between God and humanity, and it speaks of a 'turning point';

"They shall return", "They shall come..... ; and I will return them to their homes".

The psalm is a song of thanksgiving for the power of Divine love that creates change in a universal and inclusive manner;

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: for his loving mercy is for ever.

2 Let the Lord's redeemed say so: whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,

3 And gathered in from every land, from the east and from the west: from the north and from the south.

Colossians again illustrates a universal turning toward the higher things in life;

"seek the things that are above", "the ways you also once followed..... now you must get rid of".

And

"seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!"

Finally the gospel, the un-heard gospel of Luke, and that's where we started so today's sermon comes from the former Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge; and now the Director of Research at the Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics and Founder of the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at Cambridge; Stephen Hawking

Does money matter? Does wealth make us rich any more? These might seem like odd questions for a physicist to try to answer, but Britain's referendum decision is a reminder that everything is connected and that if we wish to understand the fundamental nature of the universe, we'd be very foolish to ignore the role that wealth does and doesn't play in our society.

As the prime minister, Theresa May, said in her first week in office: "We need to reform the economy to allow more people to share in the country's prosperity." Money is also important because it is liberating for individuals. I have spoken in the past about my concern that government spending cuts in the UK will diminish support for disabled students, support that helped me during my career. In my case, of course, money has helped not only make my career possible but has also literally kept me alive.

Cash can set individuals free, just as poverty can certainly trap them and limit their potential, to their own detriment and that of the human race.

So I would be the last person to decry the significance of money. However, although wealth has played an important practical role in my life, I have of course had a different relationship with it to most people. Paying for my care as a severely disabled man, and my work, is crucial; the acquisition of possessions is not. I don't know what I would do with a racehorse, or indeed a Ferrari, even if I could afford one.

So I have come to see money as a facilitator, as a means to an end – whether it is for ideas, or health, or security – but never as an end in itself.

Interestingly this attitude, for a long time seen as the predictable eccentricity of a Cambridge academic, is now more widely shared. People are starting to question the value of pure wealth. Is knowledge or experience more important than money? Can possessions stand in the way of fulfilment? Can we truly own anything, or are we just transient custodians?

These questions are leading to a shift in behaviour which, in turn, is inspiring some groundbreaking new enterprises and ideas. These are termed "cathedral projects", the modern equivalent of the grand church buildings, constructed as part of humanity's attempt to bridge heaven and Earth. These ideas are started by one generation with the hope a future generation will take up these challenges.

I hope and believe that people will embrace more of this cathedral thinking for the future, as they have done in the past, because we are in perilous times. Our planet and the human race face multiple challenges. These challenges are global and serious – climate change, food production, overpopulation, the decimation of other species, epidemic disease, acidification of the oceans. Such pressing issues will require us to collaborate, all of us, with a shared vision and cooperative endeavour to ensure that humanity can survive. We will need to adapt, rethink, refocus and change some of our fundamental assumptions about what we mean by wealth, by possessions, by mine and yours. Just like children, we will have to learn to share.

If we fail then the forces that contributed to Brexit, the envy and isolationism not just in the UK but around the world that spring from not sharing, of cultures

driven by a narrow definition of wealth and a failure to divide it more fairly, both within nations and across national borders, will strengthen. If that were to happen, I would not be optimistic about the long-term outlook for our species. But we can and will succeed. Humans are endlessly resourceful, optimistic and adaptable. We must broaden our definition of wealth to include knowledge, natural resources, and human capacity, and at the same time learn to share each of those more fairly. If we do this, then there is no limit to what humans can achieve together.

Article from "The Guardian" (Money/opinion)

[Our attitude towards wealth played a crucial role in Brexit. We need a rethink](#)

Stephen Hawking

"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed;
for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

The church may not yet have heard this gospel message, however, what we hear and appreciate from Stephen Hawking is that a the Director of Research at the Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics has just discovered the very essence of Luke's gospel message, and so the possibility for change, the turning point of Hosea is very much a reality that might unfold.

Additional notes

Stephen Hawking recently launched [Unlimited World](#) and here's the title or opening of six articles from that website:

1. Question: Does wealth make us rich anymore?
2. An exploration of what current trends in the sharing economy could mean for the future of ownership and perception of wealth. Can stories and experiences become more valuable than things? Can ownership become something less individualistic and wealth something less tangible?
3. What does rich even mean? - What does it mean to be rich in today's world? The economics of wealth are changing fast and it matters for you, your company and your country.
4. The Material Self - The first step in thinking about the future of possessions and wealth lies in appreciating the tremendously varied and changeable attitudes to wealth over the course of history...

5. Tomorrow's Wealth - Today an unprecedented set of challenges is facing our globalised society and is forcing new understandings of wealth. Will these new understandings lead to a radically redefined concept of wealth?