

Homily for 4 August 2013 (Proper 13, Year C)

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23. Psalm 49:1-12. Colossians 3:1-11. Luke 12:13-21

I talk this morning about simplicity. Simple.

Not simple as in lacking, stupid, inadequate, unsophisticated, not quite all there. Not that sort of simple, the sense in which the word is often used. A somewhat derogatory meaning.

But simple in the way that it is *properly* used. In Latin, *simplex*: single, whole, having one ingredient, plain. Simple in the way that mathematicians and philosophers use the word: indivisible, incapable of being splintered—the opposite of diabolical. Innocent, modest, free from ostentation, unmixed.

Here is an image of our psychological development. We begin simple and whole in the Garden of Eden. We see the world around us and begin to make judgments. We see that we have to clothe ourselves with finery (fig leaves) to make ourselves look more impressive. We surround ourselves with more and more layers, like a Matryoshka doll. Each hurt brings more and more scar tissue. We become heavier and more complex, weighed down, more and more rigid, less and less adaptable. There's more to break down. Like electric gadgets in the car, they're more difficult and more expensive to fix. The opposite of simple.

Simple is a beautiful word. A restful word even.

It's easy to read today's Gospel story as if it were about redistribution of resources. I am nervous about preaching such a message because it soon sounds sanctimonious: look how good I am because I 'graciously' give my stuff away. When I attack the mega-rich, it sounds suspiciously like envy. The Archbishop of Canterbury recently said that if he'd been working in the financial services he couldn't say that he would have behaved any better than the sharp suited barrow boys who've got us into this mess. And neither could I. As has been said: 'it is possible for the rich to sin by coveting the privileges of the poor.'

We live in a society where governments and the advertising industry encourage us to want what we don't need. The Lotto! How would you deal with winning millions? Go round the world? Buy this and that? Buy posh clothes? Eat and drink fine food and wine? So what? After all this, you are the same you, but now with new sensations behind you. Your quest for new experiences—for that's what it is—means that it now harder for you to experience the same degree of novelty. You need more and more of whatever it is to get the same degree of pleasure. There's plenty of biological evidence for this: the biology of addiction. The more we have, the more we want. This is greed. It becomes dangerous for the community when we wilfully accumulate so that others are deprived. We possess – a terrible word. We think we are self-sufficient. If we have enough in the barn, we won't need anyone else. Greed shows a lack of love and trust. We become lonely and paranoid.

Psalm 17:10: *They are inclosed in their own fat and their mouth speaketh proud things.*

In today's gospel the man in the story was not *condemned* for being rich. It seems to me that today's gospel story is *not* about renunciation, though there is plenty in Jesus' message about exactly that. Today's story seems more about how to cope with good fortune. It's not about giving it away: it's about sharing it. By sharing we demonstrate our connectedness, our not being separate. The Good Samaritan shared his wealth. When we keep things to ourselves we become wizened and twisted and consumed, like Gollum. We become being *inclosed in our own fat*, behind electric gates and security fences. We can stop trying to accumulate goods or feelings or emotions. We can simply exist and enjoy. Living with trust like this, directed towards the Divine, reminds us that there is no point trying to secure the future solely through possessing more and more just for the sake of it. Before it's too late, let's share what we have: talents, time, money. That's what the men in today's story need to be doing. Enoch Powell said that political lives, 'unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, *because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs.*'

St Paul recommends that we kill everything that belongs to the earthly life, and 'especially greed, which is the same thing as worshipping a false god.' To attempt to keep possessions and memories locked 'in a barn' is like chasing after wind. *Vanity of vanities*. We can not recover the feelings we once had, we can not find the same stimulation we once found. All passion spent. It is a great blessing: I can relax. It doesn't matter what I have or what I'd done. What matters is who I am and how I share what I am.

A rich woman dies. *Where there's a will, there are relatives!* How much did she leave? *She left everything.*

In our lives we move from simple to complex and hopefully to simple again. The wisdom of age.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gain'd,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.