

Sermon for Holy Trinity Geneva on Sunday 3 August 2025 am – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity

*Texts: Ecclesiastes 1.2, 12-14; Colossians 3.1-11; Luke 12.13-21*

**‘Live now for what matters in eternity’ (Richard Rohr)**

I’ve never owned a barn. I’m not sure I would want one, let alone multiple ones, nor have I anywhere to put them. But I can readily think of things of which I would like to have more. In my case, top of the list would be bookcases. I never feel I have enough. So in my fantasy, I would have a whole room, all four sides dedicated to bookcases, and in my imagination, the room grows in size, so that it is able to house more and more books, inspired perhaps by the wonderful ancient library at St Gallen in Switzerland which I visited earlier this year.

Each of us here I imagine has a barn fantasy – that is, something which in our dreams we would like more of and this fantasy will probably be different for each one of us here. It may be fun to share this over coffee afterwards. Sometimes the barn fantasy remains just that – a dream which amuses us in our idle moments. But sometimes it can be far more serious threatening the way and the purpose for which we live our lives. So the message in our Bible reading today is both a stark warning but also a reminder – remember what this life is all about and the immense potential which it is offering us.

The warning is twofold. First of all, and the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes doesn’t beat about the bush in his message about this, we need to remember that we are mortal. Whatever we build up here on earth whether it’s barns, libraries, big houses, our Swiss bank accounts, or a great power base – all this comes to an end on our death. We have little or often no control as to what will happen thereafter. In earlier centuries because there was far more limited health care, death was never far away and our forebears lived far more closely with this as a daily reality. In contrast, in our own age, it is far easier to put it out of mind to the point at which death almost becomes a taboo subject.

The second part of the warning is this. Our desire for the barns (whatever form they may take for us), can up both controlling us and causing immense harm both to other people and to our world. It leads us, at the most basic level, to forget that we are made by God and that our life and ultimate hope lie in Him. As we feed our desire to have more, whatever that ‘more’ may be, our focus becomes centred on that end so that we have eyes and attention for nothing else. And, as we become more determined to get what we want, we end up being driven by negative forces of greed, selfishness and desire for power and control over others to achieve our goal. Often we may too, become less concerned as to what happens to the world either as our natural environment or the kind of society we are becoming if these concerns lie in the way of us getting the thing on which we have set our hearts.

So this is the warning. But the second message of our readings today is ‘Remember for what we were created – our ultimate purpose’. It’s a message of infinite hope for

us, not doom and gloom. We are created by God out of love to love Him and share with Him in the life of eternity. As St Paul points out in his letter to the Colossians which we've heard today, in Christ, we see the unconditional love which God has for each one of us. It's a love which has called us into existence, sustains us, and calls us to share love, beyond this earthly life within the life of the Trinity in eternity.

As Christians, we believe that this physical life is not the end of the story but instead, we will share in that eternal life into which God raised Jesus from the dead. Our calling in this life is to enter more and more deeply in the life of Christ which is true life. By so doing, we can also help others to glimpse the reality and joy of that eternity.

The Franciscan writer, Richard Rohr describes this in these wonderful words – 'Live now for what matters in eternity'. We're not created to build up barns, bookcases or building empires of power, but to live for Christ and in Christ. As the prophet Isaiah said, "Don't labour for that which is not bread" – in other words, don't waste the gift of the precious gift of life you have been given on this earth, on things which we know will end with our physical death. Instead focus on that which is truly life-giving and will also give the gift of life to those who will come after us.

How do we do this? By committing ourselves to Christ in trust and seeking to live by the values which Christ has shown us. Values of kindness, generosity, deep empathy so that we learn to imagine and put ourselves in the shoes of other people, especially those who are vulnerable and, in most need, and to respond to them with love and understanding. To show patience, forgiveness and a readiness to seek reconciliation.

It also requires us to recognise and accept courageously that there are things which militate against this and if we follow them, will lead us further away from Christ. It's why St Paul who combines profound theology with complete pragmatism, spells out for us those attitudes and patterns of behaviour which are really tempting but against which we need to be on our guard.

These include consciously rejecting those things which diminish both us and others. Relationships outside marriage, sleeping around, using pornography, gambling, which might feel like fun for the present but end up damaging us and fracturing family relationships. Focusing obsessively on things we want to possess whether they be physical items, money or positions of power and status which can lead us to make them into idols which we worship rather than God.

St Paul also makes it clear that we also need to be very alert against ways of behaving which often accompany these things. So he warns against anger – not the righteous anger against injustice to others, but bad temper and outbursts we use to control others and get our own way or the anger which nurses a simmering resentment against wrongs done to us and will not forgive. He warns us against malice – that is harbouring conscious desire in our heart to hurt other people. And he warns us against slander – using the beautiful gift of speech which God has given us, to diminish and wrong other people. All these things matter.

However, we are human with all our human weaknesses and foibles. So, one of the qualities which can most help us, and for which we need to pray, is this gift of humility. Not to be a doormat – someone who has given up personal responsibility in the face of others, but rather a true Christian who acknowledges before Christ every day, our own weakness and falling short, and prays to grace to live in a more Christ-like way.

In all this, Christ is our litmus test – that is, the one whom we look and reflect on our own lives and seek to discern whether we are following Him or our own ends.

There is a wonderful image in Colossians of the life to which we are called by Christ in our baptism which is true life. Our old selves are stripped away and we have clothed ourselves with a new self, which, in St Paul's words, 'is being renewed according to the image of its creator'. In our new selves which are rooted in Christ, all the previous barriers of human power, race, sex and wealth come tumbling down and what we find instead is that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

As well as not talking about death much nowadays, we also tend to speak very little of joy. We can be inclined to believe that being a Christian is about turning our back on this world as bed of evil and fixing our eyes on the next life. But this is not what it is about at all.

Christians are not called to deny this world – quite the opposite. We believe that it has been made by God, it bears His image, and he has created us to rejoice as we live in it and to share that joy with others.

So, we are not being asked to escape this world for the imagined joys of heaven. Instead, we are being called to live by the values of eternity now, as Jesus has shown us. Jesus himself prayed to God 'Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'. If we live by the values of Christ, which are the values of eternity, we can help transform this world now.

And perhaps as we learn to live in Christ by the values of eternity, we may learn to view our physical deaths as less a disastrous and tragic end and rather as the gateway to that life of glory for which we have been called by God.

**Amen**

**Canon Daphne Green**