

LUKE 12:13-26  
THE WHOLE PICTURE

There's a game that we play with our grandson when we've done a jigsaw and so that it does not just get broken up again straight away: "I see... What do you see?" So we spot things in the jigsaw and that gives us another 5 minutes to that piece of play! I want to try that on a grand scale this morning, but not as some glorified version of "I spy"; let's look at the nation and people of Scotland. I see a nation confused about its future and it will be until Sept 2014; what do you see? (Think about it; write it down!) I see people excited about the Commonwealth Games next year as something that Scotland can achieve and do well. I see 2% of the population in Church on a Sunday, but its not as simple as that: I see people feeling for faith and for God, but with little time to stop and ponder the big issues of life, while others have written off faith and Church as a bad idea, for whatever reason. I see a nation divided, where some are prosperous, but where the poor are more and more marginalised. I see people running around, with little spare time, being active, keeping fit, working harder and harder, trying to make ends meet, while others have to visit the food bank to provide food. These are some of the ways in which I see Scotland; what do you see?

"You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." (Augustine; *Confessions 1:1:1*) These words are 1700 years old! They were written by a fourth century Christian from North Africa, Augustine, in his *Confessions*, looking at his life, its meaning and purpose and his quest for wisdom. These words come right at the start of the book, somehow setting the scene, defining the terms of the search; this is who we are as human beings, people with a hunger and thirst for spiritual things, for God and Augustine found his peace by his Christian faith. Some have described this as a God-shaped blank in the human spirit, the space in our hearts and minds that only God can fill. We see people looking for wisdom, for knowing and understanding of life and trying to find it in all kinds of places and with all kinds of things: wealth and possessions; family; leisure, hobbies, keeping fit; work – these parts of life become an all-consuming passion and we hope to find wisdom in these places. These old words from Augustine would remind us that wisdom is to be found in God and in Jesus and that our deepest satisfaction and our fullest understanding of life is found in Christian faith. It is all about values!

Here's a question: some of you know answer because we talked about it in an evening service. Is life a peach or an orange? The orange is in segments and if we see life as an orange then we divide life up; we have a religious segment and some other segments that we think are really important to God, church-based activities, prayer worship. But then we have other segments that we seem to think He doesn't care about, that He's not interested in: work, school, university, sport, leisure, rest, hobbies etc. the peach is different, it is all the same, homogenous; the peach view of life is to treat it all the same: The Bible's view of life, Jesus' view of life, is that God is interested in all of it and that faith shapes our attitudes to everything. Jesus is interested in our worship and prayer and church-based activities; Jesus is interested in our work-place and the way we go about our business, He is interested in the way we spend our leisure time and our money; Jesus is interested in our families and our friendships and how we go about these; wisdom is about letting faith shape our attitudes to all of life. This is the kingdom of God at work in our world. It is all about values!

There's a family falling-out. There are two brothers whose father had died and they were squabbling about estate. "*Teacher...*" (Luke 12:13) We know nothing about these two men other than what this question is all about. It is all about money, who has it and who wants it. There were rules in the Old Testament about inheritance: the older brother got twice as much as his younger brothers, but there were still disputes and this man (we assume he is a younger brother) brings the dispute to Jesus. Did one brother have it all and keep it all? Did the younger brother get nothing? Was the older brother greedy to keep it all to himself? Had the younger brother got nothing and now wanted his fair share or had he got some, but wanted more? Jesus first words are all warning: "*Watch out...*" (Luke 12:15) There is a fine line between having and being greedy for more; we're not sure whether this man had crossed that line, but Jesus was warning him of the danger. Are these words that need to be heard in our world?

Jesus tells a story, a parable. A rich farmer is bringing in his harvest and it is a good harvest; there is much to be delighted about, except that his barns are not big enough to hold it all. There is no place to store this great harvest. He has a plan: "*I will...*" (Luke 12:18) That is what he does; he builds big new barns to hold his fantastic harvest. There is nothing wrong in that; it is good business practice for the successful farmer. He goes on: "*And I'll...*" (Luke 12:19) He has this self-centred attitude in which he is pleased with himself and if that was just a sense of achievement there might not be too much wrong in it, but the sting is in the tail of the parable. The whole picture is in Jesus' last words: "*This is...*" (Luke 12:21) "Rich towards God" – it's a fascinating little phrase, all about faith, about love for God, about being loved by God and responding to that love, about trusting God, about being the right kind of people. There is a treasure in life that is not money, but is full of value and worth, meaning and significance; it is not found in a bank balance, but is found in relationship with God, the restless heart finding peace. It is all about values!

Why was this man in the news this summer? If I tell you that his name is Roly Keating, does that help? If I add that he once was controller of BBC 2 and BBC 4 that might give you another clue. He worked for the BBC for 29 years, latterly as director of archive content. He left in 2012 to become Chief Executive of the British Library. All of that is fine, but he became famous when he handed back £376,000 of severance pay. He had been awarded this money when he left the BBC as part of his leaving settlement, but later discovered that he didn't deserve this money; the payment was not "fully and appropriately authorised" so he gave it back. There was something about his action, in our culture of the last few years, that stands out; that stands out from others who seem not to understand why accepting huge bonuses can appear greedy. I have no idea what motivated Roly Keating to give his money back, other than a sense of what is honest and right, but I found what he did hugely refreshing!

I'm not sure that it is a direct contrast, but Jesus paints a different picture of what it means to be wise. "*Consider...*" (Luke 12:24) He says the same with the flowers of the field. "Look; see what God does!" He paints a picture of God providing everything that the birds and flowers need for their life. The key phrase: "*How much...*" (Luke 12:24) There is a serious piece of understanding here of God and His involvement in our world: He provides all that we need. The attitude in response is faith and trust! This is a hard attitude to have when the bank balance is large, but even then: is our bank balance something that we have achieved or something for which we are grateful that God has given us, even if God has given it to us through our own hard work? There is nothing contradictory in that, but it is all about the way that we think and how we understand that

God has provided for us! Even when the bank balance is full, there can be deep-seated anxiety about keeping it and making sure it is safe. Anxiety eats away at our spirit at times; Jesus wants us to trust the Father who provides for us everything we need.

Ecclesiastes is full of wisdom about life. The Preacher is talking to the person who spends all his time working; his life is all about his work and there's not much room for anything else. Elsewhere he talks to the person obsessed with money and never has enough, or to the adrenalin filled pleasure-seeker, or to the person who spends his whole time looking for new ideas. Work – “all that happens is that you spend all your time, every waking hour at work and in the end someone else will get benefit of your labours; one day you will have to leave the fruit of your work to someone else”. There is something empty and meaningless about that. Ecclesiastes is an evangelistic tract; you need to get to the end of it to make sense of it. If you just read bits, it seems to be full of despair, everything is meaningless. But in fact, the preacher wants you to get to the end to see that everything, work, money, pleasures, wisdom, every part of life, makes sense with faith: “*Now all...*” (*Ecc 12:13*) Work is good as gift of God; money is to be enjoyed as a gift from God; pleasures and wisdom are part of life and we are created by God to enjoy all of these things and value them and they take their true shape when faith is at the centre of our lives.

I'm taking the next 2 weeks as study leave and I have some books to read; I will be working in National Library on George IV Bridge; it is a good place to work. I will be looking at what we are as Church and how we relate to Scotland as it is now; how we as a congregation relate to the community around us, to its attitudes, its way of life. From that, the question is 'how do we shape church life, mission and evangelism and worship?' These are huge questions and I can't achieve much in 2 weeks, but I'm looking forward to learning from some people about how we tell our story and how we connect with the timeless wisdom of the Bible and how we help others connect with Christian faith and with the Church. I listen to some people at *Messy Church* or *Open Door Café*, parents with young children and they are concerned about work, having and keeping a job; they are concerned about family life and giving their children a good experience of life as they grow up; they are concerned about financial security. Some also want to connect with Christian faith, with church, but it is hard for them; what we do here on a Sunday is a long way away from anything with which they or their children are familiar.

“You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” There is wisdom in these old words of Augustine. It is all about values. Life is complete when it is centred on Jesus. Faith is the quality that makes sense of all the rest. We are prosperous people, comfortable and secure financially, but what about being “rich towards God”? Are we rich in love for God? Are we rich in the qualities of faith and trust, knowing that the Father will provide for us all that we need? We need money, but it is not the be-all-and-end-all of life; there is no need to be greedy. Many people work hard in our community and for good reason, but it is not the be-all-and-end-all of life; there are lots of pleasures to enjoy in life and we make most of them, but they are not the be-all-and-end-all of life. We find rest, wisdom, life with Jesus and in Christian faith; we can be people who are “rich towards God”. It makes sense.