

Pentecost 8, Year C

Hosea 11:1-11, Colossians 3:1-11, Luke 12:13-21

So let me start with a question. At what age do you plan to retire? Or at what age did you retire? I was 62. I was fortunate because at that time GPs and women could take their pension at age 60. I knew a Practice Manager in another GP practice who was planning to retire at 50 although a change in the law stopped him doing so just a few months short of his 50th birthday.

Well, it looks like the man in Jesus's parable in Luke 12 was able to retire much earlier than he expected after a bumper harvest. *"This is what I'll do" he says "I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."* So, he clearly had enough income on which to retire.

But Jesus is not impressed. So, is early retirement wrong? No. What was wrong was what the rich man was going to do with it. Because he not considering eternity and the sovereignty of God.

Jesus says that what is wrong is storing up things for yourself and not being rich towards God.

Now that's interesting. We would expect Jesus to say, "and is not rich towards others" but he says, *"and is not rich towards God"*. Of course, whatever we do for the least of Jesus's needy brothers and sisters we do it for Jesus. But what is important here I think is the focus, the motivation, for how time is spent. Is it for Jesus, or is it for me?

What is your focus? What constitutes the core of your life? What is at its heart, its essence? I am sure that we all agree with Jesus that *life does not consist in an abundance of possessions*. So, what does life consist of?

Let us look for a moment at the passage that we heard from Hosea:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
² But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me.

The initiative is all God's. *When Israel was a child, I loved him*. Before he was old enough to reach out to God, God loved him. We would never have loved God if he hadn't loved us first. (1 John 4:19) It is *God who so loved the world*

that he gave his only begotten son so that we might have everlasting life, God's life as our own, in which to live and move and have our being. Is this our focus?

Out of Egypt I called my son. God here is referring to the Exodus from Egypt when he rescued Israel – his beloved son – from the oppression of the Egyptian slave masters and took them across the Red Sea towards the Promised Land.

The New Testament writers tell us that the Exodus from Egypt is a picture of our release from the kingdom of darkness and the transfer into our Promised Land, the kingdom of God; a transfer brought about by our faith in Jesus's death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Israelites were rescued from a place of physical oppression and slavery. We are rescued from slavery to, and oppression by, sin, our sin.

Earlier in Luke (4:18) we see Jesus read from the book of Isaiah indicating that the Spirit has sent him:

*to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,*

So, what is your Egypt I wonder, what is mine? What have we been freed from, rescued from, through Jesus? Fear? Anxiety? Broken relationships? Resentment?

God says of the Israelites that although he called them out of Egypt, the more they were called, the more they went away. They were physically rescued but their hearts still remained in Egypt. Remember how they said to Moses in the wilderness "If only we had stayed in Egypt... We were better off there." (Numbers 11)?

The people of Israel didn't really want freedom. They wanted to return to Egypt. And are we tempted to feel the same? To hanker after a different lifestyle? Or a former lifestyle?

In Hosea (11:7) we read: *My people are determined to turn from me.*

But this is not what God wants. He loves his people as Hosea so eloquently expresses. He longs for a father-child relationship with them, as *one who lifts a little child to his cheek.* "How can I give you up?" he asks.

In his parable Jesus calls for us to move our focus away from satisfying ourselves and towards pleasing God.

He calls for us to be *rich toward God*, to store up treasure in heaven.

Not surprisingly, Paul does the same in his letter to the Colossians.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

The trouble is, we live in the midst of earthly things. Inevitably we have to engage with the things of the world. We live in it.

So maybe it's not so much about what we think about – I put together an online grocery order sat at my computer in the middle of preparing this sermon – not so much whether we are thinking of earthly things as about where we set our minds, about setting them on Egypt.

Isn't that what Paul is talking about? Setting our minds on Egypt, or even never having fully left!

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry... You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived... rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other.

Rid yourselves of all vestiges of Egypt, Paul says.

What is your Egypt? *Sexual impurity* – secret pornography perhaps? Not at all uncommon among Christians. *Greed* – maybe not for food but how about money – perhaps for an early retirement! – a need to shop, a desire for fame or recognition?

Or is your Egypt *anger* – excusing ourselves “Oh, don't mind me, that's just the way I am”? Or *malice*, speaking negatively about others behind their back? Or maybe a form of lying, misrepresenting ourselves, bigging ourselves up, or maybe taking another down?

If we have our minds set on earthly things then it means never fully leaving, or maybe going back to, Egypt. Being rich towards God means setting our minds on things above where Christ is.

Do we want to appear with him in glory still polluted by Egypt? Wouldn't we rather be clothed in our new selves, renewed in Christ, in the image of Jesus?

Jesus's parable is about so much more than what we do with our possessions, or how we use our money although these will be included.

It is about being in Christ, about walking in the Spirit. It is about the focus of our lives and how we use our time. It's about whether we dwell in Egypt or in heavenly places.

What constitutes the core of your life, the core of my life? Where is its focus?

Amen

Chris Shaw
31 July 2022