

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O lord our strength and our redeemer.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Ballardong Noongar people of the land we meet on and remember that stories of spiritual significance have been told here for many thousands of years. In doing this, I'd also like to acknowledge the elders past, present and emerging and look to continue to work toward reconciliation.

Thank you, Father Philip, and the people of the parishes of York, Quairading, Beverley-Brookton and Northam, both for the invitation to be here today and for your warm welcome. I have been looking forward to this day for a while now, with both a sense of excitement and dread. The excitement because I love this part of the world and I have enjoyed the hospitality here a couple of times in the last year, the dread, because our gospel this morning is a parable about a storing grain. I am a city girl and the closest I have been to country life is visiting family members and friends, sometimes being allowed to collect the eggs. I feel very underequipped to speak in the wheatbelt about the storage of grain.

Be that as it may, I am going to go where angels may fear to tread and spend some time exploring said parable with you today.

When I was growing up in the church, my experience with stories such as this, was generally based on fear. The message I heard went something like. We never know when we are going to die, so we better make sure we have got ourselves right with God. Now that may be one valid reading of a parable but such as this, but as I've had a little more experience in life and reading scripture, I've come to discover that parables, particularly, but all of scripture really is much richer in meaning.

I like to consider parables like a kaleidoscope. When we look inside we see a beautiful pattern of vivid colours, but twist the end just a little and the pattern changes to another just as beautifully vivid pattern, but quite stunningly different. I don't think I've ever looked in a kaleidoscope and seen the same pattern twice. The same can happen as we read scripture. So, I invite you to explore this parable with me from one perspective this morning.

First, let's look at a couple of things that stood out for me.

1. The writer of Luke places Jesus telling this story in response to a question about a seemingly fair division of an inheritance. His response is a warning about greed. Now I don't know too many people that would equate this question with greed. I'm not sure that I can reconcile this seeming dichotomy this morning, so I'm going to let that go for a moment, and it may be that another time that we come back to this kaleidoscope, we can see it's place in the pattern.
2. Once Jesus starts on the parable, I find myself asking the question, "What is wrong with building bigger barns to store an abundant harvest?" It seems to me to be a sensible thing to do, and there is a biblical precedent when Joseph told Pharaoh to store food in the time of plenty in readiness for a time a famine. It's this aspect of the narrative that I'd like to explore in more detail.

One thing to note; the response about the inheritance, was to the individual, the parable is told to the crowd, implying a more general applicability to the teaching.

Let's consider this rich man's response to this abundant harvest. – He thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and all my goods laid up for many years; And I will say to my soul, Soul you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat drink and be merry.

In those few lines, there is a key. The rich man's focus is himself. These are his crops, and he will keep them for himself. There is no recognition here of any one else's input; No recognition of God's role in supplying the abundance and no recognition of the many people who most likely would have done the work for him. This man is a rich man who owns land. He is not called, in this parable a farmer. As I said before, I don't have much experience in the production and storage of grain, but I'm pretty sure that this man would not have done all the work by himself. Without the technology that we have today, this man would have relied on many workers to plant, look after and harvest the crop. I'm also pretty sure that he would not have done the physical work of taking down the old barns and building the new ones. That is certainly not a one person job, at least not in the time frame that would be needed to protect the grain.

There is also no suggestion here that his plan is to share what he has with his community or even the people who would have helped him produce this abundance. There is no suggestion of thankfulness to God from who comes all abundance. He is focussed on himself.

Now, the way parables work, we know that this story is not a story about farming. It is a story about living. It's a story that asks us to question our priorities in the way we live our lives.

While I don't know people in this congregation well, and I don't know what country life is like, in the core of my being, like most, if not all of you do, I can read, and I can be aware of the news. I am aware of the crippling possibility of Foot and Mouth disease, I am aware of the vagaries of the weather, And I know that economically times are tough and getting tougher for many people and it's our country communities that often feel the pinch in times like this more than those of us in the city. We may not feel as though we live in a time of abundance at the moment.

But I'm going to suggest, that for most of us, if we look closely at our lives, we will have aspects of abundance and riches. It may not be grain, it may not be land or money. It may be an abundance of relationships in the form of family and friends, it may be an abundance in terms of skills and abilities, your gift might be an abundance of patience or a sense of humour. If we look carefully enough, we will find riches in abundance in some form.

One of the key messages in Luke's gospel, is that riches, whatever those riches are, should not be stored up and hoarded for ourselves. The focus is not I but we. Today's parable asks us to consider how we steward God's abundant gifts, how do we use God's gifts to help facilitate a world that God intended?

Last week's lection included the Lord's prayer. And part of that prayer is Your Kingdom Come. The parable of the rich man with an abundant harvest asks us to consider how we might use God's gifts to contribute to this kingdom.

This is not something we do individually. As a faith community we also have abundant riches and, as a community, this parable causes us to ask how we use our shared resources for the benefit of the whole community. And once again, I feel as if I am the wrong person to be conveying this message, since I know that country folk know well how to do community. However, here, I do feel a little more on shared ground. As people of faith, in a little while we will share the Eucharist together. We re-live God's ultimate sharing of Godself with us. We are reminded that our most important riches lie in our relationship with God and with each other as we continue to both share and become the body of Christ in the world. In so doing, we both receive and share the abundance of life that God offers. I wonder what that will look like for each of us as we venture into this week.

The Lord be with you.

