

Revd Judith's Homily for August 3rd 2025

When I was at secondary school in the 60's we were privileged to have Bishop Leonard Wilson come to our school assembly. He made a big impression.

He had been Bishop of Singapore when it fell to the Japanese and he and his staff were sent to Changi prison.

He endured brutal torture and neglect whilst a prisoner but, astonishingly, he brought a good many to faith there because of his experience of God's love through it all. I came across an address his daughter gave about her father's experience in Changi which really rang bells for me with our Bible readings today.

So his daughter spoke of how on one occasion, when seven men had been taking it in turns to flog him, they had asked him why he didn't curse them. He told them it was because he was a follower of Jesus, who taught us to love one another. He had asked **himself** then how he could possibly love these men who were obviously enjoying the torture they were inflicting. **As he had prayed he had been given a picture of them in his mind as they might have been as little children, and it's hard to hate little children.** But then, even more powerfully, he had been given a vision of those men not as they were then, but as they were capable of becoming, transformed by the love of Christ. Their cruelty becoming kindness, their sadistic instincts changed to gentleness. He experienced the grace of forgiveness at that moment.

After the war Bishop Leonard had returned to Singapore and had had the great joy of confirming one of his torturers, who was by then a prisoner himself, and had declared that he had seldom seen so great a change in a man in question, who had looked gentle and peaceful and whose face had been completely changed by the power of Christ.' Leonard's vision had been made made real.

It seems to me that this story is a real-life parable firstly of the **nature of God** ... that same nature we learn about in our reading from the prophecy of Hosea..... and also of **the nature of real wealth, treasure and riches** we learn from our Gospel reading.

In the Old Testament reading we heard God talking about his great love for his people, represented by Israel or Ephraim. And we **recognise what kind of** love this is, don't we?

How many of us, when our grown up children or grandchildren or nephews and nieces get into trouble or difficulties, or especially if they do things we feel are bad or wrong, would think back to their childhood days when all their life lay ahead of them, untroubled and carefree, innocent and cherished?

Maybe even pull out the photo album and remember those days... the days before the worries and complications of the world crashed in. The days when you could make it all better with a kiss. The days when you could keep them close and hold them as they slept.

This is the kind of love we hear **God** through Hosea expressing in this reading, a love pained and bruised because the child in question, representing God's people, has gone off the rails in a big way... far away from God. Worshipping idols. Living bad lives. And God doesn't of course have or need a photo album, but God looks back with longing to the early days too ... when Israel was a child I loved him.... I walked him on reins of love when he was toddling... I picked him up and held his little face against mine. It was so wonderful then! God looked at his disobedient, badly behaved children who had chosen to walk on the dark side rather than in the light and almost in spite of himself only sees the little children they once had been. They deserved punishment. But his love for them caused his heart instead to show compassion. To grow warm and tender. God says, 'I will not destroy Ephraim for I am God..... The Holy One on your midst' God would roar like a lion and the children would come to home to him trembling like birds. God in his love could not only see the precious little children they had been, but **also the fine sons and daughter they had the potential to become**, and through the power and grace of forgiveness, it could be so.

How amazing is that?

How amazing to think that God looks on you and me.... On saints and sinners everywhere... no matter how much we have messed up, no matter how appalling the behaviour... and can still love in us the little child we were, and call us in love to repentance, so that that we too can experience the power and grace of forgiveness, won for us by Jesus? That God still holds in his heart the people he made us to be... our own potential for living loving lives?

This was the mystery into which Bishop Wilson entered in his time of trial. Made holy through his suffering he was shaped more and more into the likeness of Christ, as St Paul would probably put it, until he saw as God sees and loved as God loves. Able to see in his torturers the innocent children **they** once were, and love this in them. Able to see the good and loving people they had the **potential** to become. And rewarded by seeing the vision of possible holiness made real when the guard who had tortured him had himself turned to God, and had been transfigured into a man full of peace and love.

So, we come to our **Gospel reading**, and the parable of the rich man and his barn. What is it in the story of Bishop Leonard that rings bells for me in this story? Well, it's the **nature of riches**. In his time Changi prison Bishop Leonard had nothing. Not even enough food or basic provision for his daily needs. And yet he had riches beyond the imagining of most of us... because **his** riches were in his relationship with God, made perfect through his own faithfulness in suffering, and also through his relationship with others - both his captors and his companions.

In his story Jesus told of a man who was rich and had an abundant harvest and who decided to store it all away in bigger barns so that he would be secure for life. Investing in **things** to secure his future. But he is reminded by God that in fact he would soon die and this investment in physical wealth would not benefit him at all, but would instead be inherited by others.

Financial advisers sometimes nowadays call themselves Wealth management advisers, I think?

Well Jesus tells the parable as a wealth management adviser on God's staff... and the principles are, not surprisingly, very different from those at your bank or building society.

Yes, Jesus is telling us, I **do** want you to invest.... But I want you to invest in relationships, not things. I want you to invest in your relationship with God. I want you to invest in your relationships with each other (friends and enemies alike). Maybe today as we face the reality of Climate Change Jesus is trying to tell us through his Spirit that he would like us to invest too in our relationship with creation? With our planet?

And what should we invest? Our love. Our time. Our prayer. Our attention. Our forgiveness. Our joy. Our hope. Our kindness. Our passion for justice.

Bishop Leonard certainly made that kind of investment in the way he lived his life and conducted himself, and he was rich indeed.

May we be moulded by God, as potter moulds the clay, into the people God longs for us to become. May we rest in God's love, as children gathered up in his arms, and being so blessed and renewed may we find courage and hope and humility in all that we do. Cherishing God, cherishing others, cherishing our world. May we seek and invest in the right kind of riches. In Jesus' name. Amen.