

Sermon: Rev Susanna Pain
Sunday 1 August 2010
Pentecost 10

READING
Luke 12:13—21

In the Middle Ages, Dante began his *Divine Comedy* with these words:

Halfway on the path we take through life I woke up and found myself in a dark wood with the right path lost and gone.
(*Seeking God's Face*, Notto R. Thelle, p.106)

Dante's path continued through rugged and difficult territory, full of dangers and pain. In medieval language his guide led him through hell and purgatory before he reached paradise!

What path are you on?

Do you seek the next step?

I title my reflections 'searching for a sustainable life'. In a few weeks I am giving a paper at an MOW Watch conference. The title I was given was 'When Father became Mother. What happens when a parish has a woman priest for the first time'. Then it changed to 'Anglican priest I am'.

In preparation for the conference I have been reflecting on my ministry and calling. Time away on retreat also gave an opportunity to sift through what is important — especially when I came to the retreat, full up and jaded and needing much time for the chattering in my mind to slow down. On retreat I learned again the centrality for me of staying deeply connected to God, to Love, the source of my being, to listen. I learned also that my approach to life is holistic. I cannot separate silence and talk, stillness and movement, prayer and the environment, sacred and profane, love and the world — all are interconnected and inter-woven ...

While others were praying in darkened rooms I was dancing or singing. While others were still in silent meditation, I was with them sometimes and, at others, I was walking in the bush.

So with these thoughts, I turn to today's gospel reading and wonder.

What demands my soul?

Not barns full of grain and material possessions, that's for sure.

What takes my attention?

If I look back over the week, it is:

Writing a sermon
Reading a book
Visiting the elderly and sick
Meditating
Planning
Listening
Sharing meals
Massaging
Worshipping God

Exercising.

And you? What took your attention this week past?

If you knew you were dying, would you change anything?

What does your life say about your treasure? That is, how do you spend your time?
Your money?

There is nothing like an illness or a retreat or day of prayer to clarify ...

My retreat reinforced for me the importance of staying connected with God through meditation, through prayer, in community.

It also reinforced my humanity — I am not God! My spiritual director said: ‘Jesus just walked around and came in contact with people; those he met, he met, those he didn’t, he didn’t!’

I heard again:

Come to me, all you who carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest for your soul.
Matthew 11:28–30

What is important? Who is this God who is gentle and humble in heart, and offers rest?

In Hosea we read wonderful images of maternal and paternal love:

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk.
I took them up in my arms ...
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love;
I went to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to feed them.

Hosea 11:3–4

This speaks of a God of tender, endless patience, and generosity, loving and forgiving and calling her children back to relationship.

This is God’s priority. This is a God who puts aside what we deserve and in grace offers forgiveness, possibility and future.

The letter to the Colossians admonishes and reminds people of what is important. Chapter 3:12ff follows this reading. It reads:

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you; so you must also forgive. Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Here are some strong hints, about living a sustainable life, a life sustained by love. Here there are no divisions of ethnicity or gender.

All these readings offer strong pointers about what is important. Yet, Holy Covenant is asking for money. We might get sick of hearing about it, but we are asking for money solely to improve our service to the community — staff to care for members of this community and beyond:

Andrea	play group, Rainbow Fellowship, Luke 14
Susan Joy	children's church, pastoral care
Rhys & Katherine	youth group
Paul	administration

We ask for money to pay staff and money for the renovations: a toilet that is wheelchair accessible, a kitchen that allows us to safely and generously offer hospitality — community lunches, Encounter, funerals, ... a carpet to replace one worn out with use.

We invite sharing time:

Holistic Care Nurse
3 visitors
Conversation group starting soon
Calvary
BUPA
Kangara Waters
Chaplaincy — Canberra High School
— Calvary Hospital
St John's Care
Prayer Vine
Administration

How are you investing your time, money and energy right now? Of these things, which of them will have lasting value and what might you want to let go of? (p.91, Seasons of the Spirit)

Jesus warns against greed, then tells a parable.

What demands your soul?

Today we are besieged by fear mongering. Have we set aside enough money for retirement? Do we earn enough to buy things to maintain a certain standard of living?

The real question for me is:
How do we become rich toward God?

What is worthy of our soul investment, as individuals and church?

- Wambiri
- Brendan in East Timor
- Central Australia
- Tikondane
- Anglicare

Dante wrote:

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I woke up and found myself in a dark wood
with the right path lost and gone.

What path are you on?

It's not about more, it's who we are and what we are.

What is sustainable and realistic?

What is important?

Be that, do that and do it well.