

Q: What does the “ Global Financial Crisis”, the Covid 19 Pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have in common? (The answer will come later.)

Many labels often define us . They can give us information about where we are from, e.g. our ethnicity such as whether we are Asian, European ,or Islander etc. What State we live in e.g.- Victorian, Queensland, West Australian. What we have achieved in our life-time.- Dr, Rev'd, Bishop, M.P. Sir. Madame, OBE, or OAM. Or we may be addressed as Mr. Mrs. Mss. thus identifying our marital status. (Handy information if on a date.)

The groups we identify with gives some information about our beliefs and values. Like the political party we support, eg. Labour, Liberal or other. Our spiritual beliefs held with like minded people such as Church denominations, Synagogue, Mosque, or physical interests like what footy team we support or gym we attend. Which school we attended informs about our intellectual background. Health labels, like diabetic, asthmatic etc. are very important for our health management. However, this does not give the total insight as to who we really are.

The setting for this parable is within the context of two brothers . One of whom is actually rather rudely, telling Jesus to arbitrate regarding their inheritance. Jesus' answered “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” There is not much information as to whether one was older than the other. If so he was entitled to twice as much as the other sibling, or did the younger want more of a share. All we know is that there was a dispute between them.

There is nothing new about this situation. Lawyers make a lot of money about inheritance disputes. No wonder Jesus says to settle things earlier, rather than go to court. However, he refuses to be drawn into the argument because he states that it really isn't what he is about. There are other people who were qualified to deal with such circumstances.

In his wisdom and being the ultimate pastoral carer, Jesus goes right to the truth of the dispute, uncovering the motive of the heart, with a warning for the listeners and also us, to “ Take care, be careful. Be on your guard (watchful) against ALL KINDS OF GREED”. He goes to the root cause, that of covetousness, greed and materialism. There is something far more important to life than having an abundance of possessions.

Jesus tells the parable of the rich man to bring home his point. The antihero of the story has a great grain harvest, runs out of room and so decides to build more barns to hold the grain. The man has his own self interest at heart. Could he have given some of his abundance to those less fortunate? No, he builds more barns, pulls down the old and builds bigger and better ones. He thinks now that at last he can relax. His superannuation is safe. He can now eat, drink and be merry.....Party, party! Does this sound familiar.?

2. However, there is a price to pay, because where his heart is, that is also where his treasure is. It is not a very stable foundation for living a full life. Hedonistic living and smug comfort, without any care for anyone but himself, leave him vulnerable to losing not just his heart, but his life, as that night he was to die.

What good did all of his self centered striving, do for him? How would he be remembered as a human being? What was his legacy to his community?

This was an eternal warning for all of us about storing up possessions, and where to put our priorities. Are we storing up riches of material value or are we rich toward God? We are encouraged to "Seek first.....the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things will be yours as well." Matt.6:33. and Luke 12:22-32 " 25 - 34

What is the origin and cause of greed.

We can visit the Garden of Eden and take a look at Adam and Eve. They are looking at the tree that God had forbidden Adam to touch. The serpent was also in the picture. After trying to discredit God's command he entices them to disobey. Sometimes, we too can hear a little whisper of justification in our head. Temptation is never that far from us. The pair saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight for the eyes, and that it was desired to make one wise.....they ate of the forbidden fruit and disaster came upon the human race.

That moment sealed their fate. Genesis 2. + 3

They were now cut off from the One who would feed, clothe and look after their welfare, totally caring for them. Covetousness and greed had now infected the human race.

Greed.The most common scourge of humankind. You only have to watch young children at a party faced with delicious delicacies to see how basic is the need to "get in first". During my isolation, I managed to clean a few cupboards, especially my pantry. I was dismayed to find most of my stored supplies were out of date and had to be thrown out....wasted

The answer to the riddle is greed....Remember the run on the supermarket supplies when the Covid outbreak began in 2019....one item in particular was the subject of a fight and caused scarcity and many empty Supermarket shelves. Why did this happen? Was it fear of missing out that motivated the greed to possess?

During the Global Financial Crisis I was to hear many a fearful story about loss of Superannuation, almost panic. Their basis of trust was shaken because it was totally based on monetary security....Matt:6

The Ukrainian crisis began because of the desire of one country to own another. Unfortunately this is a common catastrophe, causing untold hardship to many others in other countries far from the war zone. (famine in Africa, and food and energy crisis.)

3. Does greed have its roots in fear? Does our drive for self survival feed our own self interests providing fertile ground for the roots of greed to take up precious space in our hearts, crowding out compassion, caring and sharing the life of God to a desperate world.

How can we grow from greed to grace? St Paul gives us an answer. He refers to our dual natures, that of the "old nature and the new nature" and how to exchange the old for the new.....Coll.3:1-11. Self seeking can be transformed into seeking the things that are above. It means changing our focus...from the temporal to the eternal...

Mindfulness is used a lot these days. As Christians we are encouraged to set our minds on things above, where Christ is, not on earthly things. This does not mean that we become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. It means a transformation of our thinking .e.g. We no longer see people as a problem but a possibility. We now see them as God sees them. "Through His lens".

There is quite a list of what we can put to death . However, greed gets a special mention as being akin to idolatry. Why? Because it totally consumes the heart . There is no room for the Spirit. Read Coll.3:1-14. (Pleonexia.....noun mng covetousness, desire for more., especially material possessions). Luke 12:15

Remember the story of "The Portrait of Dorian Grey." It is a fascinating insight as to what happens to the heart of a hedonistic, debauched, greedy way of living. In his vanity, he had a portrait painted of himself . He lived life unto himself, careless of others. He didn't seem to age but each act of his behavior to do with his way of living, became etched in his portrait. The end result was a revolting picture of himself.

Our old nature is ugly and Paul exhorts us to strip off all the things that impede us and to reclothe ourselves. This involves our will. This is the work we do in obedient co-operation with the Spirit of God who promises to help us in our time of need.

We are not left defenseless! We are encouraged to clothe ourselves with a new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of our creator. We aren't what we were yesterday. We are being changed into His likeness through daily behavior and the choices we make. Paul confesses that he often does the things that he hates. He cries out "Who will deliver me from this dilemma". He gets his answer. "To set his mind on things of the Spirit, "which brings life and peace." (Romans Chapt 7and 8)

If you walk in the Spirit you will overcome the desires of the flesh which is the old nature.

It is God at work in us. The Spirit convicts us, and God forgives us, making more room in our hearts for himself and others. What joyful news!

4.

There are copious self help books printed to help us live a life of happiness, joy, peace etc. No one ever mentions the Word of God, our Bible. It is a treasure trove of inspiration, wisdom and ways of living a full and inspiring life.....with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

So where is our treasure? Is it seeking the Lord God and his righteousness. We will have troubles and tribulations, and testing times, but if our treasure Is Himself we will meet Him and live with Him, for eternity. He promises a safe journey to the end and a new beginning far beyond what we could ever imagine.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things on earth
Will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.” Helen Lemmel.