

Call to Worship

Come and seek wisdom together,
you that are low and high, rich and poor.
**We come from East and West, North and South,
to encounter the Living God.**

Come, let our mouths speak wisdom;
may the meditations of our hearts lead to understanding.
**We come to hear the Wisdom of the Ages,
made known to us in Jesus Christ.**

Those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches surround us.
**But we trust in the Holy Spirit, our guide and goal,
who teaches us to share our resources with the poor and needy.**

Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace

You have called us here, great God,
to remind us we were made in Your love
and reflect Your image in our world.
You call and receive us as Your own,
not through our goodness but through your gracious love alone.

You have called us here, Lord Jesus, to seek hope
despite our self-inflicted wounds,
the social forces that sweep us up,
and the powers and systems of evil which can overwhelm us.
Forgive us, good Lord, when we place our trust in what our wealth can buy,
our security in our possessions,
and our happiness in the things that entomb us.

You have called us here, Most Holy Spirit,
to free us from all that drags us down,
to remind us to serve creation, to turn from guilt and despair,
to reclaim faith and remember that love makes all things new. Amen

after Brian Wren's Great God Your Love Has Called Us Here

Prayer for Illumination

Enable us, O God,
to seek out wisdom in all that is done under heaven,
and now, as we listen to Your word read and proclaimed,
help us not to chase after wind but follow Jesus Christ,
Your word made flesh. Amen.

Readings

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 | Psalm 49:1-12 | St Luke 12:13-21

All Age Activity

Here are a selection of activities to explore the theme of sharing.

Money Race: Have the children all stand on one side of the room, divided into two teams, with each team getting a money box or bag. The teacher will tell children to turn around or close their eyes while the teacher scatters play money around the church. When the teacher says GO, the children will try to gather as much money as possible in the time allotted by the teacher and place it in their box or bag. When the time is up, the children will then get back into their team group. The surprise will come when the teacher tells the children switch bags and unselfishly give their bag of collected money to the other team. Let the teams count the money and see who has the most from the race! Then tell children that they all are winners because they shared their money with others!

Bubble Blessings: Get or make some bubble mixture. Let the children blow soap bubbles and tell them that every bubble stands for a blessing that God gives to us. Let children begin naming the blessings God has given them as they blow the bubbles. Have the children sit in a circle after blowing bubbles and name ways that people can be selfish and forget about God's blessings.

Share a Snack: Give the children all of the fixings to make an ice cream Sundae. They will make a sundae thinking that it's for themselves, but when all have finished, the teacher will say "now pass your Sundae to the person on your right." Ask them how that feels; does the shock of giving the sundae away lessen with receiving another one?

Ideas from: <https://sermons4kids.com/activities/the-parable-of-the-rich-fool>

Sermon Notes

I've never had the courage to respond "everything" when asked how much money someone left after they died. Yet, our readings today imply just that, and deal with the foolishness of valuing wealth and possessions which don't last and are like mist which evaporates.

Ecclesiastes

This book is part of the collection of Old Testament books referred to as 'Wisdom Literature'. Its title is a transliteration in Latin from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Kohelet* often rendered as *Teacher*. The Rabbis ascribed it to Solomon but the presence of some Persian words, and some others clearly influenced by Aramaic, mean scholars think it was written at some point between 450 and 180 BC - so it is later than Solomon. The Teacher looks at life and its unhappiness concluding we should enjoy the simple pleasures of daily life such as eating, drinking, and taking enjoyment from work as these are all God's gifts. In today's passage the Teacher is clearly unhappy, maybe bothered by his own mortality (v18). The word translated as "vanity" comes from the Hebrew *hevel* meaning mist or vapour. Humans, like the steam from cooking or the morning mist, are here only for a moment. Efforts to secure advantage through wealth or pleasure are, like the mist, fleeting. The Teacher knows that one can't take wealth with us when we die; we leave everything behind. The Teacher appears to be very wealthy – like the powerful in our world now. The thought of leaving all that he's toiled for behind seems to make him despair. Maybe the Teacher had come to realise he was looking in the wrong places for happiness and security; maybe his realisation that wealth and success is, after all, fleeting is being worked out in these verses. He does (in chapter 9: 7-9) hold that the best we can have is to eat, drink and enjoy life rather than hoard. There is much in contemporary society that would agree we should slow down, be more mindful, and enjoy the good things of life rather than be forever rushing to accumulate yet more wealth and possessions which ultimately don't satisfy and, like our modern diets, always leave us wanting more.

Psalms 49

This Psalm also deals with the themes of mortality and wealth. This ancient poet reminds us of the obvious – we will all die; mortals and animals, the wise and the foolish have the same end. The reality of mortality is sobering but should not lead us to despair; instead, we should be looking to make life count. In Ecclesiastes this is about attending to the good things of life, in St Luke it's about being rich in God. Instead of trusting in money or wealth we are to trust in God. Instead of storing up an excess we are to use our resources to alleviate suffering. Believers are often tempted to think that the good things in life they have are rewards from God for being faithful – of course they then think that those who don't have good things must have been unfaithful. This 'prosperity gospel' is a heresy which must be resisted. The witness of Scripture is that we are blessed in order that we may be a blessing. The fact we are blessed is an accident of birth or circumstance (or do we really believe that God destined so many to be poor and destitute?). In v12 the Psalmist notes that the one who has riches without understanding will perish. Perhaps the poet meant that the significance of death differs; those who trust themselves and their wealth will perish as dust in the ground, but those who have lived in God's grace, using their blessings wisely, live on in God's new realm.

There's a tension in our lives between the need to save for the future - rainy days, retirement, providing for self and dependents - and passages like this where Jesus tells us to be wary of greed and that life is not about an abundance of possessions. We might, like Joseph in his message to Pharaoh, be prudent and save in times of plenty to see us through lean years. Instead, we're called to be "rich in God". This might mean following God's laws, caring for the poor and marginalised, and giving a fair share to those without access to the world's resources. Barns need to be emptied to give the contents to the poor. The rich man in the parable stores wealth for himself but does not share it with those in need; and, of course, he can't take his wealth with him when he dies. The rich man only speaks of himself; *I have no place to store my crops...I will pull down my barns and build larger ones...I will store all my grain and my goods...I will say to my soul...* Yet neither he, nor us, exist as individuals but in communities of people which need each other. The self-centred rich man can't see beyond his own needs and desires. He ignores those he must serve. The rich guy, no doubt believing he's a self-made man, disregards God's providence in his good fortune. He also forgets the fact that life always ends in death. Giving no thought for what comes next is a preoccupation of our contemporary world too. The rich man made idols of his possessions; something we continue to do.

Weaving Threads

This is a difficult set of passages to preach from. We are used to sermons on stewardship asking us to give something back to God. We're used to being asked to share resources but we're also used to trying to explain away these hard sayings – hard for those of us who have what, or more, than we need. It's easier for the rich to spiritualise these words! Our economy works through the lie of us needing more. The car industry wants us to buy a new car every few years, electronic goods often come with built-in obsolescence, after a while our computers and phones can't accept the software updates, and we must renew the equipment. Trends in fashion and interior design lead us always wanting to look good and to have the finest things in our home. It's not really our fault, we're trapped in social movements and system we don't fully own. Yet Jesus, standing in the tradition of the Old Testament teachers, knew that wealth and possessions are not to be prized, distract us from God, and are given that we might use them wisely. So, we have to balance a set of responsibilities – to ourselves and our families, to the poor and needy we see and those we don't. We fulfil this in part through our taxes but in societies which want Scandinavian levels of public service with American levels of taxation there will be a need to do more; foodbanks, women's refuges, development charities at home and abroad all need our support. Giving is good for us and reminds us that we can't take anything with us at the end.

Affirmation of Faith

We live in a world where economic growth is prized, wealth accumulated by a few, and security is found in possessions. **But Jesus reminds us:**

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”

We live in a world where the rich get richer and insulate themselves against life’s harshness, leaving the poor to starve in the cold. **But Jesus reminds us: “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”**

We live in a world where the earth itself is pillaged, the poor dispossessed, the air we breathe polluted, the climate warmed, and where many more species will become extinct. **But Jesus reminds us to be “rich toward God.”**

Instead of abiding in pomp and selfishness we are called to live with the values of the Kingdom, where the hungry shall be fed, the poor lifted up, and the earth honoured. **And Jesus reminds us to “take care” and “not store up treasures for ourselves.”**

And so we work for a world where resources are shared wisely and widely, where the earth is valued and cared for, where the hungry and thirsty are fed and well nourished, **for Jesus tells us to seek first the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness. Amen.**

Offertory

In our world we are valued for what we have and for what our money can buy we are told to amass an ever-greater number of possessions, and to ignore those with less.

In the Kingdom of God, however, we know

- we value people for who they are not what they have;
- we share our resources seeing ourselves as stewards not owners of them;
- we must work for a just and more equal division of resources.

And so we give.

- We give to charities and causes,
- we give to the work of God in this place and across our nations,
- we give as an expression of our faith, and as an act of discipleship;
- we give of our time, our talents and our treasure.

Let us pray.

Giving God, bless all the gifts given in this place,
that as we share and use them,
we do as heralds of Your coming Kingdom. Amen.

Intercessions

In a world ever chasing wealth and possessions
we bring our prayers to the One who calls us to share what we have.

O Most High,
we bring to You places of war and terror in our world. *(pause)*

Bless those seeking to be peacemakers,
give strength to those who cling to life despite the odds,
give hope to children that they may grow up in a better world,
and change the hearts of those wedded to war, power, and terror.

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

O Risen Lord,
We bring to You our dangerous cultures and ways of life. *(pause)*

You owned almost nothing yet changed the world,
Change our hearts that we may reject love of money,
Use our resources more fairly,
That hunger and poverty is banished,
And the earth, itself, is healed.

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

O Holy Spirit,
We bring to You all that is wounded in our world, and in our lives. *(pause)*

You give us the power to change;
to make this world more just;
give us the grace to listen to You and follow where You call,
that we may not be afraid to be heralds of the coming kingdom.

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

Eternal Trinity of love,
We bring to You all those we worry about. *(longer pause)*

Give grace, peace, hope and love,
and make us agents of change.

God, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

As Jesus taught, so we have the courage to pray, Our Father...

Communion Prayer

Long ago, the Apostle Paul wrote to the fledgling church in Corinth advising them about life, faith and worship.
In the first letter we have from him to those early Christians we read:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed
took a loaf of bread, and when He had given thanks, he broke it and said,
'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Since then, Christians have shared bread and wine to proclaim Christ's death,
to unite ourselves with Him as we are gathered up into His presence,
and to receive sustenance for our souls and bodies.

Over the years much ink has been spilled reflecting on what Jesus meant
when He said "this is my body" and "this is my blood".
Many images have been used to explain this ritual:
meal, sacrifice, sign, sacrament, thanksgiving, communion, mission, and mystery.
When we come to Communion we come to meet Jesus our host who serves us
and feeds us with his own self.
When we come to Communion we sit at the Lord's own table where all are welcome.
We come to be fed with Peter who denied knowing Jesus,
with the disciples who deserted Jesus in his hour of need
and with Judas who betrayed Jesus.
We eat and drink with all who have gone before us, - great saints and dreadful sinners –
and are united with them, and with our Risen Lord, through time and space.
With them we sing of God's glory.

Holy, Holy, Holy

Reginald Heber (1783-1826) (Public Domain)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,

which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God almighty!
all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea;
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Yes, Lord You are holy and call us to holiness in life.
From of old You called a people to be Your own,
set them apart from other nations,
taught them through precious Law and righteous prophets to be a light to humanity.
Again and again, they turned away from Your path.
In the bitter years of exile, you reformed them,
teaching them to sing Your song in strange lands.
Through the years of national renewal and in the bitterness of occupation,
You urged them to be faithful.
In the fullness of time, you raised up, from them, Jesus of Nazareth,
Your anointed One, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, Your embodied self,
to shine in our gloom.

Jesus, You, taught the crowds, healed the sick, delivered the possessed,
and proclaimed Your coming Kingdom.
The powers of evil rejected, tried, tortured, and killed You,
but You were not left in the grave to rot and were raised on high.
You sent the Holy Spirit, who seeks us out with such care and cost
to urge us to live lives of holiness.
For these great gifts we praise You;
for your care and self-emptying love we thank You,
and now we see You have prepared this meal for us,
offering not just bread and wine but Your very self,
that we may be healed, filled, and made new again.

Most Holy Spirit, come upon us now,
set this bread and wine apart from all common use,
that it may be, for us, the body and blood, of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and that we might be, for Him, his body and blood in our world.
All this we pray, Eternal One, through, with, and in, Jesus, our suffering and risen Lord,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.

The table is set, the meal is ready,
Let us eat and drink as Jesus taught,
Welcoming the poor and outsiders to our table,
May their absence here remind us of the wounds this meal seeks to heal,
May their presence truly transform us into the body and blood of Christ which we share.
Amen!

Post Communion Prayer

Living One,
You have fed us with Your own self
and united us with You in the heavenly places.
Send us from this place filled with Your Spirit,
eager to do Your will,
sharing what we have,
seeking to be your light in the gloom. Amen.

Blessing

May the One who loved you since before the ages began,
the One who taught you how to live with honest simplicity,
and the One who calls You to find security in Him not possessions,
give you the power to love, live, and trust
in the values of the coming Kingdom.
And the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Energising Spirit,
be with you,
now and evermore, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Great God Your Love has called us here	339	484	499	
Jesus Lover of My Soul	332	490	355	372
God of grace and God of glory	344		682	192
All My Hope on God is Founded	586	192	455	16
Sing for God's Glory		172	116	
Sing to God New Songs of Worship		173		600
Take My Life and Let it Be	371	502	566	624
Lord You Have Come to the Seashore		532	558	
A Rich Young Man Came To Ask of Christ				1251
A rich young man came seeking			243	
As A Fire is meant for burning		252		
Now Thank We All Our God	72	182	81	486
Sing to the Lord a Joyful Song	77	184		929

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

You may also find this recording of the haunting [And Am I Born to Die](#) by Charles Wesley a useful piece to play and/or '[Tis a Gift to be Simple](#)' which folk will know the tune to if not these words.