

The Rules of the Sand Pit ...

... reflecting something of the loving nature of God

A talk given at our joint Harvest Festival on 1st October 2023 by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster

Luke 12:16-30

Now, I wonder whether you can remember when you were little and your parents drummed into you a set of simple rules for life, what you might call the rules of the 'sand pit'. And they were things like this:

Don't snatch; share everything; don't hit people; put things back where you found them; keep your feet to yourself; play fair; let everyone else have a turn as well; don't take things that aren't yours; don't be greedy; and remember to say 'Thank you.'

They were simple rules designed to stop us from spoiling things for everyone else. But as we get bigger, something strange happens. As we get into our teens, we start to discover that a lot of grown up people who are supposed to know better don't follow the rules of the sand pit at all. Instead, they seem to follow a quite different set of rules, rules that say things like:

You've got to look after yourself first; there's not enough room for everyone; don't get mad, get even; never apologise; you're not one of us; you can't get something for nothing; you've got to be realistic; charity begins at home; I'm watching you; you owe me.

In other words, from early childhood to adulthood, there's a strange kind of shift from one way of living to another. The first way is open and generous and trusting and makes room for other people. But the second way tends to be a bit closed: it's a bit suspicious of other people; we get anxious that there isn't enough to go round; it's very defensive.

But in our reading this morning, Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God is more like that first way of living: that the Kingdom of God runs according to generosity and grace, rather than on greed and fear. And in the story about the rich farmer building more and more barns, Jesus is saying what's the point of piling up more and more money and building up more and more wealth if money can't protect you from old age and death? And he points out that God's world is generous and abundant, so that the birds and the flowers are provided for. So he says why be so anxious that there won't be enough for you? The only reason we worry that there won't be

enough is either because other people are so greedy, or else because we find it hard to believe that God really is generous.

But, folks, He is!

And this Harvest Festival, we have Gaia in the Minster just for the rest of today. And it's been amazing seeing all the people coming in and seeing Gaia and many of them being quite moved by it - that sense that this is our home and we've got to share it and look after it, because there isn't anywhere else. And at harvest time we're reminded that all the world is God's gift to us and that the world is beautiful and full of life and it's fruitful and it makes a wonderful home for all of us, so we need to look after it and share it and make room for one another.

Because when we get greedy and anxious, we spoil the world and we say, 'That's mine, you can't have any, I got here first. Find your own planet.' But when we see Gaia, it reminds us that there isn't another planet. God has given us just this one and he expects us to share it and look after it and not pretend that we have a right to it all by ourselves. It's a gift and not a possession, and it shows that he loves us. But he loves all of us equally - He doesn't have any favourites.

So if the Earth is a gift [*Jonathan moves down the nave to ask his questions*] - this is a question I'm going to get interactive now. If the Earth is a gift and the harvest is a gift, how might we react? What should we do when somebody gives us a wonderful gift like planet Earth and all the food from the harvest? Any ideas? Any of the brownies got any ideas? What do you do when somebody gives you an amazing big gift like that? Yes, go on, then. You say 'Thank you.' Yes, that's the first thing, isn't it? You say thank you. Any other thoughts about what do you do when somebody gives you a very special gift? Yes, hand up there. What do you think? You look after it. Very good. If somebody gives you a lovely gift, you don't just junk it and say I'm not interested - you look after it; it's precious; it's a reminder that somebody loves you and cares about you and we look after it.

So let's remind ourselves of the rules of the sand pit this harvest time to help us remember that the Earth is a gift and the fruits of the Earth are wonderful gifts, and that this precious gift is for everyone, not just for a few. We learn all of these rules as very young children, but there's nothing childish about them, because these rules reflect something of the open, generous and loving nature of God Himself.

So:

Don't snatch; share everything; don't hit people; put things back where you found them; keep your feet to yourself; play fair; let everyone else have a turn as well; don't take things that aren't yours; don't be greedy; and remember to say 'Thank you.'

Reading Text

Luke 12:16-30

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" ¹⁸ 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 my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ²⁰ But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.' ²² He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you-you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.