

12th Sunday after Trinity, Year C

Luke 12.49-59

Back in the day, the composer Beethoven sometimes enjoyed playing a trick on polite salon audiences, especially when he guessed that they weren't really interested in serious music. He'd play a nice, slow, gentle, beautiful movement. People would relax; they'd slip into a soft, cosy place of beautiful semi-slumber. Then, just as the final notes were dying away, Beethoven would bring his whole forearm – bang (!) – with a crash across the keyboard and laugh at the shock he'd caused; at the people startled out of semi-slumber. Cruel and impolite perhaps, but Beethoven also found less antisocial ways of telling, through his music, that the world was as full of pain as well as of beauty and also of making the transition in the other direction from tragedy into joy. But it's the shock of those crashing notes interrupting the melody that's a good image for what Jesus has to say today.

The crisis is coming. It will challenge the absolute loyalty of his followers. Even the peace of the gospel is being turned on its head; the gospel will create division and it *will not* bring peace. There is an imminent crisis and the *only way forward is complete trust in God*.

Jesus could see the crisis that was about to hit Israel. His contemporaries were good at predicting the weather; clouds rolling in from the Mediterranean meant rain; hot dusty wind from the Negev meant sultry weather; easy. But why can't they see that from the Roman occupation to the oppressive regime of Herod, from the wealthy and arrogant high priests in Jerusalem to the false agendas of the Pharisees and in their midst a young prophet announcing the kingdom, why can't they see the crisis that's coming? Why can't they see that this is the very moment that God is demanding their very life for the benefit of his world?

This isn't history. This is our story.

This is a warning to us that we must read the signs of the times, the great movements of people, governments, nations and policies and we must act accordingly if the kingdom of

God is to come on earth as it is in heaven. Part of our role is to speak as a prophet would, to understand the events of earth and to seek to address them with the message of heaven. And if we find that we seem to bring division, that we ourselves are caught up in the crisis, then so be it. What else would we expect? We have been warned.

Now is not the time for cosy comfort. Our lectionary often tries to screen out all the parts of the scripture that speak of judgement, of warnings, of the stern demands of God's holiness. We need to be woken up by Jesus' words today. Now is not the time for sleeping. Now is the time to be awake, to be alert, ready for our master's call.

And when he calls, his demand is total. Our world of western, free-market, liberal democracy has some very set ideas about how to use resources. It has some very set ideas of who's 'allowed' to comment in this area – and it certainly doesn't include the church and definitely *not* the gospel in any form. But that's not the sort of parish church we're in. The gospel covers every single angle of our lives; from community to personal life; from love to hospitality; from behaviour to sex; from politics to finance. I'm not intending to steer well clear of money. I'm not intending to steer well clear of Jesus' personal demands on us. He is Lord of all. He is Lord of all of us.

And if we're to be loyal and faithful to him, then we must put into practice that radical part of that radical prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." The kingdom of God must permeate our lives and through us; the lives of all whom we know.

This is the underpinning of stewardship. It is part of our prayer, our worship, and our lives. We are stewards and we give to God as God has given to us. He gave us his only son, in unconditional, unmerited, and abundant love for each one of us, his creations. He continues to give to us. God's generous love for us and his many gifts and blessings to us are staggering, humbling, beautiful... If we have so freely received, then surely we must freely give. If God is generous to us then we must in response be generous to him, his

Church, and his Kingdom. Our very response to God's gift is to gift to him in return, our very own selves; our time, our talents, our treasure.

Those three things are in balance. Many of us already tithe – already give 10% to God, already give 10% of our time or our talents, not simply treasure. The prophet Malachi puts it like this:

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.” *Malachi 3.10*

In other words, to give back to God as God has given to us will result in God giving back to us in great and generous abundance. That generous spirit is already here amongst us. Today is not simply a Sunday given over to asking you all to give even more. God will already be prompting you to think about your giving and where your giving is directed. God will already be at work in your hearts, calling you to consider where your time, your talents and your treasure would best serve his kingdom. Today is the day that we give ourselves over to God. Today is the day that we are open to God's vision for us. Today is the day that we say to God that we are open to be moved by his Spirit.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit:

We dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be our guide.

We dare to embrace each other and grow together in love.

We dare to share our riches in common and minister to each other when we're in need.

We dare to pray for each other until our hearts beat with the longings of God.

We dare to carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places.