

Sharing the wealth



Lord of all, keep me mindful that real happiness can never be found in having barns full of grain. Teach me to value love, compassion and generosity over material wealth and assets. Amen.

Shared prayer

Part IV – praying as a church throughout the week

by Caroline Fletcher

Today we're thinking about how we can pray together as a church throughout the week:

- A prayer diary. Each page of a booklet represents a day of the month, and contains prayer suggestions for individuals, church activities, community organisations, etc. The booklet can be kept in an accessible place in church, or a week's worth of suggestions could be listed in the notice sheet.

- A prayer chain. This is used for urgent prayer needs. A group of people commit themselves to this ministry, one of whom acts as co-ordinator. Someone with a prayer request contacts the co-ordinator, who contacts the next person in the chain, and so on.

- A prayer board. This is simply a board in church to pin prayer requests.

All these activities need to be publicised and kept fresh in people's minds through announcements and notice sheets. Over time people will the message that you are a community alive with prayer. 🙏

“ True religion is not about possessing the truth. No religion does that. It is rather an invitation into a journey that leads one toward the mystery of God. Idolatry is religion pretending that it has all the answers.”

John Shelby Spong (1931-2021), American bishop of the Episcopal Church

Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Luke 12:13-21

A rich man takes steps to shore up his assets, thinking that the security he gains from knowing that his barns are brim-full with grain will give him freedom to relax and enjoy life. Jesus is unequivocal – the man is mistaken. But, you might think, isn't he simply doing what millions of us do all our working lives? His modern-day equivalent wouldn't build barns, but she might take out a pension plan or put her money into savings or investments. In the not-too-distant past, various pensions scandals left many people worse off – with some facing real poverty instead of the comfortable retirement they had planned and saved for. One way to interpret this passage is to

see these events as Jesus' words becoming reality. So where does that leave us? Should we cancel our pension policies and withdraw the funds from our bank accounts?

I don't think that's what's at the heart of the message. The key lies in how the rich man addresses himself – notably, he speaks to his soul: “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.” The sin, perhaps, is not in building barns or saving prudently, but in believing that we can derive real peace from accumulated wealth, when true peace of mind comes from learning how to be “rich towards God,” and the way to do that is to be rich, loving and generous towards one another, whatever form that may take. 🙏

The books of the Old Testament

1 Kings

by Trevor Dennis

It opens with David nearing death. Back in 2 Samuel, Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet played a key role in David's decline. Now they collaborate again to ensure that Bathsheba's son Solomon succeeds David. David settles old scores, including killing a man who once cursed him. This sordid business reminds us of his other side, that the books of Samuel exposed.

After that the books of Kings talk of David as a saint, who followed God “with all his heart”. They claim that Solomon

“excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom”, merely touching upon the other side of his story – riding roughshod over tribal loyalties; breaking people's backs with taxes, forced labour and military service. Things are so bad after David's death that the kingdom splits in two. But Solomon builds the first Jerusalem Temple, which for the writers of Kings warrants giving him a halo.

The final chapters tell wonderfully vivid stories of conflict between the prophet Elijah and king Ahab. Their significance endures, for they are about speaking truth to power. 🙏