

## Hope for a Future - Reflection

*Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15*

*1 Timothy 6:6-19*

*Luke 16:19-31*

If, in the time you have spent online, you have wandered onto websites frequented by young people, you may have come across one called "Temu" which has the slogan "Shop like a billionaire." As the slogan suggests, it is filled with cheap purchases where your average person can buy plenty of stuff without worrying about how much it is costing. In this era of fast fashion, where advertising creates the peer pressure for young people to have the latest and greatest each season, it does not matter that things are badly made and only last a short time, because soon enough the pressure is on to buy something else new.

All three of our Bible readings today are about money – and, as one commentator noted, that's one of those very frequent themes through the Bible. It is not so much about whether or not we have money, but rather the question of how we get it and how we use it.

The rich man, in our Gospel reading, is pictured as obscenely wealthy. Add to this that purple was not a colour that one could simply choose to wear. Expense aside, only certain Roman citizens could wear purple and not be punished. Wearing purple meant our rich man collaborated with Rome and was rewarded for this work. In all likelihood, the people who heard this story would have understood that collaboration as being part of the source of his immense wealth.

With the power of Rome behind him, our rich, but Jewish, man was used to getting what he wanted, when he wanted it. I would imagine it was a shock to him when he discovered his fate was not going to be what he wanted and here he is, still trying to control the lives of those around him. And so, he wants Lazarus, who he had ignored throughout their lives, to work as a messenger and do the rich man's bidding.

The rich man is criticised for how he got his money and how he is using it.

The epistle reading contains one of those well-known lines that has made it into popular culture: the love of money is the root of all evil. When we look at this in context, we see people making money out of preaching and teaching in the churches of the day. Not surprisingly, this led to some of the false teachings – teachings that would make the preacher the most money. There is temptation to do whatever is necessary to make more money, because it is money and not love that becomes the most important thing.

Like these preachers of old, today we have the "prosperity gospel" preachers who make vast amounts of money and turn their "churches" into a ponzi scheme. Money is used as a proof of the claim that particular individuals are loved by God. It stands in stark contrast to Jesus the Christ who was tortured and killed for his faith.

By contrast, Jeremiah's use of money looks like utter foolishness. The Babylonian army is besieging the city and the field is utterly useless. In a siege, the price of food is skyrocketing. The field cannot be accessed to feed Jeremiah, so he is giving precious money, which could be used to buy food and keep him alive, to his relative

for a field. To have any benefit from that field, either the Jewish army would need to win or the Babylonians would have to decide to let people keep their land. Both these scenarios were incredibly unlikely.

In ancient Israelite tradition, there was the concept of redemption. Rather than families losing their land when they struck hard times, it would be sold to the closest relative who was able to buy it. This would keep the land within the ownership of those who had an obligation to support the seller, whilst giving the seller the dignity of living from their own money rather than charity. There also was the requirement every 50 years for the land to be given back. It kept wealth in balance and the families able to meet their needs.

As international trade grew, those with a bit of wealth started buying up more and more land in order to plant single crops that could be traded for luxury goods. The rich got richer, and the poor became poorer. The land, which had been cropped in sustainable ways through the rotation and resting of pastures, became stressed. We hear of the transition away from traditional practices in the story of Naboth's vineyard; in today's Old Testament reading, we hear of Jeremiah using this practice as a symbol of God's redemption of the people; a symbol of hope for those who have had hope taken away. Jeremiah had money and he used it well.

The question is how we get the money and what we do with it.

Given this is Sustainable September, I will leave it up to you to reflect on that question of how we get money and what we do with it. However, we do also see a parallel with our environment. We have a question of how we get the things we want and what we do with them. Do we consider the impact of what we buy and if there is a better option? Do we throw things away and move on?

Many of the people here grew up in times of rationing due to war, from parents who knew shortages from the Great Depression. We know what it means to reduce, reuse, and recycle because that has been part of our lives for so many years. At the same time, we have also been part of the generations that have discovered having plenty, ramped up the advertising, and have brought up the later generations that developed a throw-away culture without thinking of the impact this has on the world around us.

And so, as we come to the end of Sustainable September, I wonder what practices from days past are worth holding onto and teaching to the young people in our lives, practices that will help us be more aware of how we get our modern-day riches and how we use them. What will we rediscover in our lives that will help our world have hope for a future with life in all its fullness?