

The Right Reverend George Cassidy
7th Feb 2010

G R E E D

Jer 8 v10 "from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain, from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely"

Luke 12 v18 "I will pull down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods ... I will say to my soul relax, eat, drink and be merry! ... but God said ... YOU FOOL"

- There have been particularly disturbing things happening in British society over the past 12 months.
- The exposure of a flawed parliamentary expenses system, and its flagrant abuse by some parliamentarians;
- The credit crunch and the threatening collapse of the British banking system
- BOTH extremely disturbing in themselves

But even more disturbing has been the high flown hypocrisy and muddled thinking of critics and/ commentators ... including I suspect many of us??

You know the sort of thing I mean?

e.g. I am reminded of a friend, a QC involved in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry a decade ago telling me of the cant/rhetoric which was used at the beginning of the Inquiry

- ... “this sort of tragedy must never be allowed to happen again”
- to which we would wish to reply “get real” and drop this naïve perspective of fallen humanity!

As we think around our subject of GREED this evening; I want to suggest

1. We must avoid self righteous judgementalism

- if we are honest we are all quick to judge others
- and often lend our voices to a chorus of indignation
- We need to be very much aware that we tend to draw the boundary between NEED and GREED at a convenient place for the temporary satisfaction of our own appetites!!
- A study of the Bible reminds us of the biblical synonyms of greed ... covetousness, avarice, insatiable desire, excessive love of money or selfish gain.

- The Greek “PLEONEXIA”; especially means graspingness, and uncontrolled desire way beyond the reasonable bounds.
- In 1Cor10 vs6-8 “EPITHUMIA” means passionate desire, and is treated as a further synonym where idolatry is symptomatic of misdirected desire centred on making the indulgence of SELF the main motivation of conduct.

1. If we must avoid self-righteous judgmentalism of others

2. WE must look perhaps to the Biblical ANTONYMS to find an outlook/attitude which will help us develop a theological framework/ and spiritual perspective which will lead to fulfilment and contentment in life.

*This of course leads us to the most impressive antonym ... namely GENEROSITY; which is of course the characteristic which marks out the very nature of GOD himself.

e.g. the German theologian Jurgen Moltman insists that “ GOD IS NOT IN LOVE WITH HIMSELF“
... as if His Will were not also for our good!

- Idols can be manipulated to be instruments of our own desire; which is why scripture often associates greed and grasping with idolatry.
 - However Bible history is about the gracious and saving acts of a Generous God.
 - Cf 2Cor 8 v9 “you know the generous act of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”.
 - If we are to avoid self-righteous judgmentalism we need to pay heed to the tragic anecdotal examples of greed we find throughout scripture ... from Gehazi to David to Judas Iscariot to Ananias and Sapphira.
 - Scripture has after all been given for our learning and that we might be complete in Christ.
1. We must avoid self-righteous judgmentalism
 2. We must find a theological and spiritual framework in which to think and live
 - 3. We must allow ourselves to be embraced by the generosity of God**
 - this is more existential if you like !

- the one true and living God who in his generous love towards us sent his son Jesus Christ, to freely and generously give himself on a cross for us ... wants by his Holy Spirit to transform our unstructured and shapeless lives ... and to put his generous love within us.
- As we freely and gladly accept the generous love of God ... for us, to us, within us ... we find a new outlook and awareness which will lead us to vigilance and self discipline.
- Vigilance according to Augustine and Luther, does not mean eternally gazing at the sky in open mouthed expectation!!
 - but rather God's Spirit within us ... inclining us to oppose ...
 - Indulgence, laxity, spiritual drifting ... and of course ... GREED.
- The contest is as simple and as crude as this ...
- GENEROSITY OR GREED ?
- Which is it to be ... ?
- To be consumed by insatiable greed and so the death of the soul?
- To be embraced by the life-giving Spirit of a generous God, and find life in all its fullness and contentment ... even with little.

Jeremy Taylor
Preb of Southwell, Bishop of Down & Connor,
Chaplain to Charles 1, VC of TCD
Writes in his book Holy Living

“A longing after sensual pleasures is a dissolution of the spirit ... and makes it loose, soft, wandering and unfit for noble, wise spiritual employments ... accustom thyself to cut off all superfluity in the provisions of thy life ... If you suffer your desires to extend beyond the measures of necessity ... THEY WILL STILL SWELL ... We must more take care that our desires should cease, than they should be satisfied, and therefore by reducing them to small proportions is best ...”

It is so very heartening today to see so many of the younger generation offer themselves for service within deprived communities, and overseas, before embarking on mainstream careers; and in doing so establishing a value system for life and equipping themselves with a proper sense of proportion.

“I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones ... relax, eat, drink and be merry ... YOU FOOL !