

2026 TALK, 19.4.26, MATTHEW 6:19-34, PSALM 8

EARTHLY & HEAVENLY ECONOMY

(PHOTO) Let's begin my talk by looking together at two photos, taken earlier this month, but already iconic images... Here we have, on one side, the four astronauts of the Artemis II mission to beyond the moon. This was a record-breaking & impressive mission - that's despite the malfunctioning space toilet...! These four human beings are representative of us all. They could also be seen as being like the writers of the four gospels, who themselves ventured into new territory by writing a new story for the whole human race. 'Boldly going where no-one had gone before'. Giving humanity a new vision of what was possible, with God's help. This was true of the first believers in Jesus. And it is true of these four astronauts.

These four people travelled further than anyone before them. And they were first to orbit the moon. Victor Glover, the first black man. Christina Koch, the first woman. Jeremy Hansen, the first Canadian. One of the highlights of this mission was witnessing the Commander of the mission, Reid Wiseman, naming a crater on the dark side of the moon after his late wife, Caroll... A deeply human moment in the depths of space...

But of course we know who it was on this mission who stole the show don't we? Not an astronaut or a jar of Nutella. No... Planet earth stole the show. Breath-taking. This photo gives us a wonderful new perspective on our own existence. Our planet peeking out from beyond the dead, lifeless surface of our moon. This amazing orb, bursting with colour & life. As Christina commented, what made it all the more powerful was the contrast with the vast blackness surrounding our planet. She also said that it was a timely reminder of how much we all share & have in common. One planet. There is no 'Planet B', despite the plans to build a space station on Mars within the next decade or so... Our earthly home is irreplaceable. It's on this surface, not on the moon or Mars, that God-in-the-flesh walked. It's this earth which God plans to make new, by bringing heaven down to earth & making a new heaven & a new earth. Who knows how? But in Christ, our cosmic Redeemer, all things are possible.

One of the things which made Artemis II all the more timely & meaningful was that it coincided with all the awful violence & trauma in our world. As Jesus comments in the Sermon on the Mount: 'If your eyes are unhealthy, your

whole body is full of darkness & how great is that darkness!...'. Not without significance that another word for 'unhealthy' here is 'stingy'. Like Scrooge, not open but closed. If we look at the world through screwed-up eyes, if we have a tight-fisted approach to life, then everything gets 'screwed up' & goes dark...

The title of my talk, 'Earthly & heavenly economy' was deliberate. If you look at the word 'economy' in the dictionary, there are two meanings for this word. 'Economy', on one hand, suggests being thrifty & making savings. Nothing wrong with that. This type of economy has a smaller focus. Important, in these days of our cost of living crisis, to look to make economies, both personally & as a church.

The other meaning of the word 'economy' is a much bigger word. Wonderfully all-embracing. It effectively means 'everything'. It's like this picture of our planet. All the riches & the treasure of earth... & heaven. One of the things I love about these challenging words of Jesus here, is the way he suggests earthly & heavenly riches can be equivalent. Yes, earthly riches are fleeting & fading. Not to be stored up on earth. Instead, earthly riches can be stored up & invested in heaven, in God's Kingdom. Like the thinking of part of the Lord's Prayer... 'Father, your will be done, on earth, as in heaven'...

I would contrast this thinking about 'economy' with the saying of J Paul Getty, who was notorious for devoting his life accumulating riches. He apparently once said, 'Whatever you see, it's all money'... 'How great is the darkness' ... Here is the problem which Jesus identifies with our attitude to earthly riches. A problem particularly pertinent for today. We live in a time when the richest tiny minority of our world's population are getting even richer, while the poorest get poorer & more numerous. The super rich – those who are not similarly generous with their riches - are making the biggest mistake. They imagine that this treasure is theirs to possess. Whereas our planet is **God's Commonwealth**. Something we can all share in & live here without worry, if we trust our Heavenly Father, rather than getting anxious & greedy. Of course, this is not just a problem for the super-rich. In these days of rumoured shortages, we can all get anxious & fall into the temptation of panic buying, for example. One day a 'run' on toilet roll (if you pardon the pun); the next day some left running on fumes due to panic-buying of petrol.

With all that's been going on in the Gulf & the conflict over particular trade routes & pinch-points, JD Vance accused Iran of 'economic terrorism'... As if this was somehow the worst kind of terrorism... And as if the US (& the UK too) hasn't been guilty of this kind of 'terrorism' in trying to dominate the global economy. Too many world leaders today are obsessed with building their own 'empires'. Like the tower of Babel & similarly the Bible's depiction of 'Babylon'. They represent all that is contrary to the building of God's Kingdom. The crisis in the Straits of Hormuz has reminded us of just how much of the treasures of the earth are still transported by ship. All a reminder of God's dire warning of 'Babylon's' fall in Revelation 18 & 19... (READ Rev 18:11-13).

As has already been mentioned this morning, this coming Wednesday marks another 'Earth Day'. This has been celebrated since the early 70s (?), partly inspired by the first pictures of the earth from space. In any 'economy', 'eco' comes first. In fact there is no 'economy' without the treasures of the earth. It's just that we need to value all that we see in the right way. In the words of Paul, we need to 'present our bodies to God as our spiritual worship & allow God to transform our minds... it's only then that we will know God's good, pleasing & perfect will'... God's will for us. God's will for our planet. This is what it means, in the words of Jesus, for us to 'seek first God's Kingdom & God's righteousness - then all these earthly needs God will provide'...

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus puts us human beings in our place by pointing out the wonder of the birds & the flowers of the earth. There is such a desperate need for humility in all our interactions – with this planet & other creatures. Jesus rejoices to declare: 'I tell you the truth – even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these flowers of the field...'. These are common flowers, yet Jesus spots them as being more glorious than Israel's wealthiest King. Even though these flowers are so short-lived. Jesus does indeed say that common birds like sparrows are 'less valuable' than human beings. But let's not forget - they are still, nonetheless valuable to our Heavenly Father. (Jesus isn't talking here about the value they are sold for in a human market). They have their place in God's heart, God's economy. And what's more, they still give us human beings a daily lesson in trusting God. They don't attempt to store up earth's riches, but are simply content to eat what they find.

As I prepared this talk, I think God challenged me to read this book. It's a Christian classic from way back in the 70s. Somehow I've never got round to

reading it, perhaps because of the challenge of the title: 'Living more Simply' by Ronald J Sider. To complete the quote from the book's title: Our ongoing challenge today is to: 'live more simply, so others can simply live'.

I am sure that God led me to preach on this topic, as we prepare for our Giving Day, next Sunday. A Giving Day to support Carey's Children's, Youth & Families Work. I need to say, before anything else, that this is not just about the opportunity to give money. I would also encourage people to consider giving their time & energy & prayers to help build the Children's Church or Youth Church on Sunday morning - or our Baby & Toddlers Group on a Friday morning.

But about the challenge of giving money, either as a one-off gift or a regular amount... I am deeply conscious that many people have already been giving generously & sacrificially to grow the ministry of this church. I am also very aware of our current situation, living in a cost of living crisis which seems to be getting worse, not better. So, I would want to encourage you: seek God & God's Kingdom. Please don't allow me or anyone else, or any sense of guilt on your part to make you feel pressured into giving money next Sunday, or in the coming weeks. I encourage you, above all, to make sure, firstly, that what you give is what God is asking you to give. Secondly make sure that you have God's peace about whatever you give, whether a one-off or a regular gift. If you can give cheerfully, as God intends, then God will give you a joy in all this. And God's work here will continue to grow & flourish... Alleluia ! 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'...

We are living in worrying times. As Jesus rightly put it, very matter-of-factly: 'Each day has enough trouble of its own'. The challenge for each of us each day, like the birds of the air & the flowers of the field, is to learn to trust our Heavenly Father. He knows all our needs. And will provide for us, even in these difficult & dark times. God will provide – sometimes in miraculous ways, often in more mundane ways, through the gifts of others... Amen?...

Let me finish by reading this wonderful picture from John's gospel. We are called to be one with God's creation, to flourish as part of God's vine: (READ JOHN 15:1,5,16). Verse 16 is the verse I have chosen to read this afternoon, at the launch of Andre & Irena's Ukrainian Church in London, called 'The Way'.

Let's be quiet now, as we reflect on this picture of us as part of a much larger, living being. God has indeed given us all a rich inheritance... Through earthly blessings. Through the blessings of the One from heaven, our Saviour, Jesus. How glorious, how awesome to be one with Christ & one in Christ, the True Vine... Thanks be to God !

TIME OF QUIET (SHOW PHOTO AGAIN)

SONG – 629SF You are the Vine, we are the branches (x2)