

Sermon on Sunday 20 September 2020

at the Service in Church, by Rev. Wendy Sellers

Creationtide – Week 3

(Readings: Deut 24.14-21 and Matt 19. 16-26)

One of life's great pleasures is, for me, a cup of tea. And I prefer my tea made in a teapot.

I am aware that there are people who dunk a teabag in a mug, and I do try very hard not to judge them. But I was brought up to believe a proper cup of tea comes out of a teapot.

And, I've brought my teapot along to show you. It lives next to the kettle, because it's in constant use.

Now, you would think that one teapot is enough – but no. I also have these teapots. They are Portmeirion and match my everyday crockery. But one is too small and one too large. Hence the blue one.

Surely, three teapots are enough for any curate. Yet, here is teapot number four. It's a Christmas one, and each Advent this one goes away and that one comes out. I am embarrassed to admit I actually have an entire set of Christmas crockery.

And, lastly, here is teapot number five. This Wedgwood teapot was a wedding present. The Wedgwood set is seldom used – not only are we terrified we might break it, but, also, it's not dishwasher safe.

I do not collect teapots. These merely represent the fact that I have a lot of stuff. Owning more than I need, I don't even use it all.

I suspect I am not alone here. Firstly, in having lots of things and, secondly, in feeling incredibly uncomfortable about this at times.

You and I know only too well that there are many people worldwide who live in poverty, by whatever definition of that term we use. We know there many people locally who also live in poverty by UK standards. And economic poverty is often linked to educational, health and other forms of poverty, too.

Estimates are that in the UK about a quarter of people live in financial poverty. That rises to a third of all children, with poverty most likely

among working-age people and families. For many, it is a long-term situation.

Yet, in global terms the UK population are well off. Worldwide about 10% of the population live in poverty – defined as living on less than \$2 a day. This has dropped from 36% in 1990, which suggests efforts to improve the lot of the poorest on our planet have been making an impact. Unfortunately, it seems inevitable that COVID will reverse this trend – with the poor disproportionately affected in terms of income, health and education and, in many cases, in terms of safety and security, too.

My teapots demonstrate how wealthy I am. I am not rich, but I have more than enough of anything I need. Sometimes I even have too much. If I have more than I need – I feel I must define that as greed.

We all know that this is not what God wants the world to look like – full of extreme inequality. God wants everyone to have sufficient for their needs. The planet, in spite of its ever-growing population, can supply that, but not at current first-world levels. The result is that some of us lack basics like water, food, shelter and medicine, while others own five teapots.

When we face up to world poverty, it can seem overwhelming. How can we help? What can we do?

In the Gospel reading, the rich young man is told he must give away his riches to follow Jesus. This causes him great pain. The Gospel reading is hard, because it suggests there are only two paths to choose – what I want is to follow Jesus and keep all my teapots. I can comfort myself that this episode is about one particular man in a different set of circumstances, but my conscience digs away at me.

We have no idea what the young man did. Did he go home sadly and retain his riches? Or did he indeed choose to become poor and follow Christ? And, if he did, how did that work out for him? Was the sacrifice worth it? Was he happier afterwards?

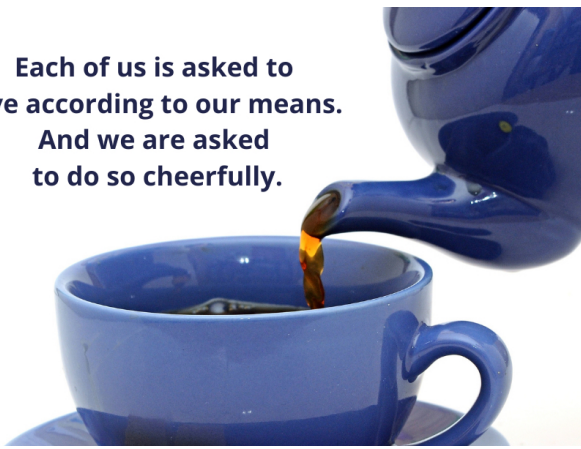
I can't just give away everything I own – my husband would have something to say about that. So, what can I do? What should I do? The answer to those questions is going to be different for each of us.

For some, giving is the obvious answer – money, time or goods. You and I cannot easily give directly to the poorest in the world. But we can, perhaps, do something about poverty locally.

For example, many of you will donate to the foodbank. Can you give more regularly? Or, alternatively, I appealed a few weeks ago for clothing for St Joseph's Church to distribute to babies, to rough sleepers and women in refuges. If you donated, thank you. If you didn't get round to it, please think about it. I'm willing to drop them off. And I can't tell you how much fun I had buying baby clothes in a supermarket. Maybe you would, too.

I'm sure many of you will also donate to charities. Perhaps you do so regularly, and Gift Aid, too. I confess that writing this sermon made me review my charitable giving and yesterday I sent up a new direct debit to Christian Aid.

Each of us is asked to
give according to our means.
And we are asked
to do so cheerfully.



Maybe the most precious thing we have to offer is our time or our respect as we recognise Christ in others. In the Deuteronomy reading, the poor gather up what is left behind, but their active involvement means they are not made to feel they are objects of charity.

Recently, Sue Mulligan and I had a visitor when St Andrew's was open for prayer. A young man was rough sleeping, having recently come out of prison. He had been out in the pouring rain and was soaking wet. We found him a sleeping bag, some food and some dry clothes. Sue found a book of readings. I gave him my spare waterproof out of my car. We listened and made him welcome. I hope and pray he found his way safely back to his family in the Midlands. I hope we showed him respect.

Whatever we do, however we do it, we have to continue to give if we want to follow Christ. Each of us is asked to give according to our means. And we are asked to do so cheerfully.

So, if anyone lacks a teapot, I'll do my very best to part with one of mine, cheerfully.

Amen