

SERMON for Pentecost 20 – October 26th, 2025.

Readings: Joel 2: 23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18; Luke 18: 15-30.

In the name of God, Source of All Being, Eternal Word and Life-giving Spirit. Amen.

In the introduction to her reflection on this week's readings, Revd Sue writes:

There is a theme running through much of scripture of the abundance of God and the desire of God to bless us. We hear some of that this week. In Joel and the Psalm, we are reminded of God given seasons of plenty and replenishment. And the generous restoration of Israel. In Paul's letter we hear of the abundance to come for the faithful. And in the gospel we are confronted with a new understanding of abundance – the plenty that comes to those who give up everything for the gospel. (Luke 18:15-30)

There is a version of abundance theology that has become popular and seems to me an expression of greed and anxiety more than dependence and gratitude for the goodness of God!¹

She continues by describing an experience she had with this “abundance” or prosperity theology. Having also experienced something like this on a couple of occasions, I don't even want to go there!!

What I do want to do, is to look at the very rich Gospel we have this morning. I had a sense when looking at the readings, of one of my previous bishops, telling those of us about to be ordained, that our vocation was to “PREACH THE GOSPEL”!!

So, as we turn our hearts and minds to today's Gospel, we see a very powerful message in what it means to be a disciple and the cost of following the Way of Jesus.

There are three parts to the reading in Luke which point to what is expected by those who follow Jesus, not just in the first century of the Christian Era, but now, twenty-one centuries later.

The first part tells the story of so many people wanting to bring their children to be blessed by Jesus.

Reflecting on this, we see a striking contrast between the openness Jesus shows to children and the underlying exclusivity that can exist in religious and social systems. especially as Jesus welcomes children and challenges prevailing assumptions about who can enter God's kingdom. In these verses, Jesus deliberately reverses social norms by embracing those considered insignificant or unworthy—the children—declaring that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. This act undermines the notion that access to God is reserved for the privileged, powerful, or those who meet certain standards. Instead, Jesus insists that entry is not based on age, status, wealth, or achievement, but on a posture of childlike trust and dependence.

By highlighting the openness of God's kingdom to all, Jesus invites his followers to reject barriers and embrace the radical inclusivity at the heart of his message. The passage calls us to examine whether we, consciously or unconsciously, create boundaries that prevent others from experiencing God's grace. True belonging, according to Jesus, is not earned but received with humility—a powerful reminder to welcome others as freely as we ourselves have been welcomed.

Yet, as the narrative shifts to the rich ruler, we encounter a different kind of exclusivity—the subtle temptation to believe that status, wealth, or adherence to rules can grant access to God's kingdom. Jesus exposes this mindset by highlighting that no human effort or possession can achieve eternal life. Instead, the invitation is radically inclusive: all are welcome, but entry requires humility, surrender, and reliance on God's grace, not on personal merit or privilege. This challenges us to examine any attitudes of exclusivity we might hold and to embrace the wide welcome Jesus extends to all who come to him with childlike trust.

The rich ruler's question—“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”—reflects a sincere desire, yet Jesus' response reveals that following him requires more than outward obedience to commandments. When Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give to the poor, he touches on the ruler's attachment to wealth and comfort, highlighting how easily material possessions can become barriers to wholehearted discipleship.

Here, riches are portrayed not simply as material blessings but as potential stumbling blocks to genuine discipleship. Jesus' interaction with the rich ruler illustrates how wealth can foster a false sense of security and self-sufficiency, making it difficult to fully depend on God. The ruler's reluctance to part with his possessions reveals how easily riches can become idols that compete with wholehearted devotion to Christ.

Jesus' challenging words about the impossibility of a camel passing through the eye of a needle emphasise that wealth, while not inherently wrong, can entangle the heart and distract from the radical trust and humility required for entry into God's kingdom. Yet, the passage also assures us that, with God, transformation is possible—what is impossible for humans, God can accomplish. Ultimately, the use of riches is reframed: rather than being a means to status or security, our resources are to be held loosely and used generously, reflecting the values of God's kingdom and our trust in his provision.

Generosity and humility stand at the heart of Jesus' teaching in this passage. In welcoming children, Jesus models a humility that recognises the worth and dignity of those often overlooked, urging us to approach God's kingdom with childlike openness and dependence. This humility is not self-deprecation but an honest awareness of our need for grace, inviting us to set aside pride and status.

Likewise, generosity is emphasised in Jesus' challenge to the rich ruler to give away his possessions. Here, generosity is not merely an act of giving, but a radical reorientation of the heart—a willingness to loosen our grip on wealth and comfort for the sake of others and the kingdom. True discipleship, Jesus teaches, involves both generous sharing and humble trust, freeing us from the constraints of self-interest and enabling us to participate fully in God's generous, inclusive love. In this way, generosity and humility are not optional extras but essential marks of those who follow Christ, shaping our relationships and our daily choices.

The cost of discipleship is brought to the forefront through Peter's words: "We have left all we had to follow you." Jesus responds by assuring his followers that those who sacrifice home, family, and security for the sake of God's kingdom will receive immeasurably more in this life and the next. This exchange highlights that discipleship entails real and sometimes costly surrender—leaving behind comfort, relationships, or worldly status in order to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

Yet, Jesus reframes this cost not as loss, but as gain. The promise is that God's generosity far exceeds what is given up; disciples receive a new community, spiritual blessings, and eternal life. The true cost of discipleship, then, is a willingness to trust God's provision and prioritise his kingdom above all else.

For me, today's Gospel poses a few questions:

- Who do I, possibly unconsciously, exclude from God's message or community?
- What is it that I can't let go of, that blocks following Christ more closely?

As a Franciscan, one of the greatest struggles I have is with "poverty" until I learnt the lesson of "holding lightly" to the many things I have been blessed with. The story of the rich young man and Peter's words to Jesus, calls us to loosen our grip on earthly possessions and attachments, to be generous with all we have, knowing that following Jesus leads to a deeper, lasting reward.

So to sum up, the things which spoke to me from these three vignettes is to live a life of openness to all, in humility and faith; to be generous with what I have, rather than holding onto my blessings out of fear, trusting God, that in my steadfast faith I will receive the blessings of love and wholeness which can only come from the Divine.

Therefore, my "abundant theology" is about openness, humility and generosity ... and above all, love. Amen.

Revd Sally Buckley
26 October, 2025.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

1. Revd Sue Lodge-Calvert in her reflection *Abundance and Blessing* as posted on her blog www.companionsontheway.com on October 22, 2025.