

An Extraordinary, Ordinary Life

WISE LIVING

Ecclesiastes 11

V1-6 NIV

1. Cast your bread upon the waters for after many days you will find it again.
2. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon you.
3. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth, whether a tree falls to the south or to the north in the place where it falls, there will it lie.
4. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.
5. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things.
6. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that or whether both will do equally well.

This is one of those interesting passages you read, and read again and still wonder, what can I say about this passage?

If clouds are full of water they pour rain upon the earth, if a tree falls it lies where it falls, great and.....

You suddenly realise why I am away this Sunday! (only joking)

Maybe the teacher is reminding us of God's order in life, rain clouds will come and go long after we have all passed away.

So the best I could come up with was feeding ducks, which is the last time I cast my bread upon the waters. Referring to verse 1.

Although I am not sure you should feeding ducks bread anymore. But back in the good old days, it was different, walk by a pond and even if you did not have any bread with you, the duck would swim over expectantly hoping to be fed.

I use to look at the ducks when I fed them, you had the big ducks who always raced to the front to be first.

The ones on the outside would try and get some of the leftovers. I use to try and make sure all the ducks were fed equally but you could not guarantee it. Sometimes I just throw the bread in and hoped for the best.

So it begs the question what is our bread? Where are our waters?

In the living bible translation the first two verses say

Send your grain across the seas,
and in time, profits will flow back to you.
² But divide your investments among many places,
for you do not know what risks might lie ahead.

I read one commentary which said these verses almost certainly refer to sending your grain off to get the best price.

Dividing your investments to minimise your risks, today in the business world we would call it portfolio management - hold stocks in say ice-cream and umbrellas. Depending upon the weather you will make some money

You might not get the best return on your money but you are also unlikely to lose lots of money either with a broad range of investments. So the teacher says send your grain off to different countries you will get some sales.

So nothing new under the sun, business people and investment managers then made money then and still make money today, by following Godly principles.

It's all about taking and minimising risk, so when you look at the risk statement in the annual accounts, they are not as boring as they may seem. We are following biblical principles, being wise in how we run this church, this community.

However I love the words - almost certainly - it is a bit like defusing a bomb in a film! If you cut the red wire I am almost certain it won't detonate. Great choice - I am almost certain.

I guess we would all like to live a risk free, steady, comfortable, lukewarm Christian life, where things tick on year after year. However, I am not sure that's always the place God wants us to be, a place where we never step out of the boat or allow God to meet us along the way.

We would not be in this building had we not risked it all!

Coming back to the ducks, I was born an optimist, for me the cup is always half full, something will always turn up. And if I knock the cup over trying, perhaps it will rain and fill it up!

Just as an aside, in my experience, is there is a bit of tension when an optimist and a pessimist try to feed the ducks, or cast their bread upon the water.

The pessimist thinks: Let's wait a few days until the climate conditions are right, the wind is blowing in the right direction and the bread is at its optimum dryness to float the furthest. Let's cast some bread upon the waters each day and see what happens.

The optimist thinks: Let the ducks have it all know, someone will come along another day and feed them, there is always another loaf.

The optimist sees the pessimist as too slow and depressing, whilst the pessimist sees the optimist as reckless and too impulsive.

The ducks are probably a bad example but we are talking Ecclesiastes so anything goes!

I think there is a balance somewhere in the middle, divide your investment in many places but invest, still send your ships, still cast your bread upon the waters.

Some things will work out and some won't. But don't let fear hold you back feed the ducks whilst they are near.

So what is our bread? What are our waters?

Some commentators say this first verse is not really talking about waters like a duck pond or river but more about planting along the river's edge.

It is feasible to cast seed into the water and as it floats away it gets planted somewhere else on the river's edge.

What we do know is the river Nile floods in the wet season and when it recedes it leaves very rich fertile soil behind where you can plant a crop and harvest it before the winter rains fall and it floods again.

At the church meeting we were looking at preparing the soil of the church; We were looking at how to retain and encourage young people to stay in the Church, maybe God has been washing us clean, preparing the soil of our hearts in this Church so God can plant fresh seeds of hope and love in our lives and across this town.

The Message version of this passage comes at it from another angle.

Be generous: Invest in acts of charity.
Charity yields high returns.

² Don't hoard your goods; spread them around.
Be a blessing to others. This could be your last night.

³⁻⁴ When the clouds are full of water, it rains.
When the wind blows down a tree, it lies where it falls.
Don't sit there watching the wind. Do your own work.
Don't stare at the clouds. Get on with your life.

As Ian reminded us 'Carpe-Diem' Seize the Day!

⁵ Just as you'll never understand
the mystery of life forming in a pregnant woman,
So you'll never understand
the mystery at work in all that God does.

⁶ Go to work in the morning
and stick to it until evening without watching the clock.
You never know from moment to moment
how your work will turn out in the end.

Don't try to out think God just trust him be generous, invest in acts of charity.

We are a generous and loving church.

However the sermon title is Wise Living! and I think the "L" in our value statement sums this passage up for me.

Lifestyle - We will be good stewards of our time, talents and possessions

This passage speaks to me of the challenge of how we use our time, talents and possessions. I can't tell you how to do it you need to spend time with God and work it out.

I think our bread could be the gifts freely given to us by God, and the waters are the community we live in, the world we live in.

How we live matters to God.

This passage and many others reminds us that life is a mystery, we can't work it out, however hard we try!

However God has given us promises,

God says he has given us every spiritual blessing, all authority. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, of love and of self-discipline.

As sure as rain comes from the clouds God's promises will come true.

What gifts, what bread has God given this church, this community?

1 Corinthians 12v 7-11

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are

the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines

How good are we at casting all our gifts upon the water? Some areas we excel at but others we hardly scratch the surface!

I think fear holds us all back in different seasons of our lives from casting our bread upon the waters using our gifts, if we are honest.

I have seen all these gifts operate in the Church over the years here and there.

The issue is when we try something or grow in our spiritual gifts the reality is some things might go wrong, things may not turn out as expected.

I may get labelled a bit strange if I were to speak in tongues. But when a baby starts to walk for the first time, it falls, makes mistakes, do we chastise them? Or do we encourage them to get up and walk again, and again.

Do we have the freedom and space to really to cast our bread, to use our gifts to their fullest? Not for our own glory but for Gods?

Gifts are given for the good of all, for building up the church. We need all the parts of the body working well in this place to be bursting with life!

How is God calling us to use our gifts as God has arranged them?

It could simply be that the elder statesmen and women are to just share their life experiences with the next generation? And for those with many years ahead to equally value the wisdom of those who have lived life well; with all its ups and down.

The issue is how do we live life well, how do we keep growing in our faith but allow space for God to speak to us? From the eldest to the youngest we can all cast our bread upon the water as one community, one body living wisely in love and without fear.

I will finish with a prayer, attributed to Sir Francis Drake a great sailor.

Prayer is a great gift we can offer one another I see the prayer corner as a place of healing and wisdom, not a place of weakness but a place we can try to understand the mystery of life.

So what are your waters what gifts do you need to cast this this week trusting in God, that he will meet you along the way.

Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

Attributed - Sir Francis Drake -1577

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 26th March 2016, by Ian Larkham