

# Generous Choices

August 3, 2025 – Proper 18C

Today's Gospel took me back many years to the day before my husband and I decided to settle in Canmore, Alberta.

At the end of July 2001 we had to go to Canmore to be at the funeral of my husband's stepmother, Fran.

It was a lovely funeral, tastefully done, celebrating a life well lived and a death that came at the right time. The Lewis offspring, all 5 of Ron's generation and most of the 12 of the next, were all there; so were Fran's two sons by her first marriage and some of their children and grandchildren, and so were just about all of the remaining people who had lived in Canmore during its coal-mining day. At the reception we had a great time catching up with each other and with the scores of aunts and uncles and cousins who had also turned up. We had a great time – so good we had to move over to our sister-in-law's place and eat and drink and talk and gossip and catch up some more. And then, to make it perfect, our son Evan called his great-uncle George to see if they could play some music together. And George came over with his guitar, and Evan got his fiddle, and they played and we all sang on the back deck until far into the night, with a full moon rising over the mountains.

That was one of those evenings I wish I could catch and put in a crystal bottle and pull it out when things get tough. It was a jewel of an evening. There was real joy, even real healing of a couple of relationships that had needed some work. I think the angels in heaven were singing along with us. What a treasure we shared. And the next day we went and put money down on a condo under construction.

Meanwhile Fran's other kids were barely speaking. I suspect they both felt they hadn't been given their fair share of the estate – it had been divided equally among all 7 kids, their mother's children and their stepfather's children. They both thought they

should have got it all. But one of them thought his brother had cheated him out of her house, and even at the reception I could hear them muttering behind each other's backs about all sorts of half-remembered wrongs. They didn't stay long, and they left with thunderclouds hanging over their heads.

When I read this gospel about one brother wanting Jesus to make the other brother divide the inheritance fairly I knew I'd seen it before. "Where there's a will, there's a battle" a lawyer once told me.

There's an old story about a rich and saintly man who talked God into letting him take his wealth with him – as much as he could pack into a small suitcase. So he sold everything he owned and bought gold bars with it, and filled a suitcase with them. Happy, he died and went to heaven, suitcase in hand. At the pearly gates, the streets of gold gleaming in the distance, St. Peter asked to see what was in the suitcase. The man opened it and showed Peter.

"Paving stones?" asked Peter.

We'd be lucky if any of our earthly wealth counted for as much as single paving stone in the Kingdom of Heaven. What my step-brothers-in-law fought over will all turn to dust and ashes in a blink of God's eye. It counts for less than nothing.

Their mother left behind one inheritance that gleams like the brightest gold: the love that grew stronger that night between our brothers and sisters and cousins. What wealth we shared!

There is an incredibly poignant line in Jesus' story of the rich fool. The rich man, having put his vast harvest in his new barns, says to his soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." And God said to him, "Don't forget the rest of the saying – 'for tomorrow you die'. Who exactly do you think is going to enjoy those riches you fretted so much over?"

The problem, of course, is not with the eating, drinking and being merry. That night in Canmore – that's exactly what we were

doing, and I was very much aware of God's presence with us as we were doing it.

The world thinks we Christians don't want anyone to have fun. But how can anyone who takes God seriously have a problem with singing and dancing and enjoying (in moderation) good food and drink and the love of good friends? Look at the world God put us in. Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it good? Isn't it fun? Isn't it meant to be enjoyed?

The problem – what makes life here and now a living hell, no matter what happens afterwards – is taking all these good things too seriously. Thinking they really matter. Wasting too much time and effort on hanging onto them. They're nothing. They're just dust in disguise.

The only thing that matters, when it's all over and you're breathing your last, is love. Who have you loved. Who has loved you. How many people love each other because of you. And whether you've experienced something of God's love for you.

Because ultimately God loves you and me and everyone driving past us on the way from the ferry and everyone else you can think of -- deeply and passionately. That's what God's trying to tell us throughout the book of Hosea.

Last week we heard about the prophet Hosea acting out in his own life a parable of God's steadfast, faithful love for fickle humanity. On God's command Hosea married a pagan temple prostitute and had children by her – children whose names told of God's despair and grief over the faithlessness of the people of Israel. “No pity.” “Not my people”.

This week Hosea sings God's love song to Israel. The song of a mother whose children have betrayed her – “I bent down to them and fed them.” The song of a mother who would love to give up on those no-good kids: “They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.” And the song of a mother who simply can't forget the children she has borne: “How can I give you up...? My heart

recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender... I will return them to their homes.”

What counts in this world is not whether your mother’s estate is divided up fairly. It’s not whether your bumper crop is stored away safely in solid barns. It’s whether we realize how rich we are in God’s absolutely unshakable love. And how rich we are with God in return.

Being rich with God doesn’t have to mean handing over every penny you’ve got to the church – although a little bit sure would be nice. Being rich with God doesn’t mean dedicating your life to the ordained ministry or to heroic acts of service or to martyrdom, although a few hours of time now and then are good.

Being rich with God means recognizing God in the strangers who need help, in the enemy who needs compassion, in the friends who need comforting. It means saying thanks now and then, in the many ways that we parents can understand. Telling God in thousands of little ways, and maybe some big ones, that God matters to us more than all these beautiful trinkets we’ve been given to play with.

God loves us. God will never give up on us. What can we do in return? Just let those simple facts make a difference to us, every day, in the little things and the big things of our lives.

Thank you, God! Amen.