

# Fairness, Equality and Justice (Luke 12 13-21)

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*10:00am Holy Communion – 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025*

## Luke 12:13-21

<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’

<sup>16</sup> Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup> And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” <sup>18</sup> Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

<sup>21</sup> So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’

## <Prayer>

Quite commonly we find ourselves looking at passages from scripture which suggest the basis on which Christians might reasonably bring **judgement and measurement**. I wonder if you understand the basic workings of judgement in the way I do, which is that it’s a business of **360 degrees? You have to look at the whole picture.**

We know that St Matthew tells of the day when Jesus taught the people from the mountain: ‘**That which you measure to others, it shall be measured to you.**’ Remember then the strange picture Jesus painted, pointing out the parable of a spec in another eye whilst being unaware of

the obvious plank in your own eye. **360 degrees here is the mirror effect which shows to us, what others see of us, as we see of them.** Judgement is a dangerous yet necessary tool.

Now here is slightly strange statement, coming from me: ***‘there is nothing at all in such teachings on judgement which makes the Christian faith or the teachings of Jesus necessary’.*** I don’t agree with that, but many others do.

You can take the full body of knowledge in humanities and science, then make cold and logical points about how actions lead then to further actions of the same, affecting everyone involved. If we pump endless carbon into the atmosphere, we get environmental effects that we must all then live through. There are circular effects. You can make similar points about public health, crime, monetary policy, the price of housing and even the price of fish (as the old saying goes). These are things which (it is said) *are self-evidently true*, as the rationalists and secularists love to point out. It’s their favorite phrase. **When a big decision is required, just observe what goes on and deduce a full understanding of all things from there, making a clear and pure choice.** Apparently, no third party is required to teach us or to moralize us. **That cannot be true.**

**Logic says that given the same conditions – the same cause will always lead to the same effect. Words such as fairness, impartiality and objectivity work best when all around is predictable.** If you think about it, that is why sport can happen. Suppose those lovely English Lioness football ladies had seven penalties to take, with Spain only five. Or how about unequal weights in a boxing ring or a racehorse with six legs? Sport has a finite body of rules, a set time and space, and a referee. In such a repeatable setting, experience can be used well because it’s all been seen before in the same controlled format. **But life is not like that.**

Phrases such as **fairness, equality and justice** are much more difficult to achieve in the mess of life, if we want such niceties as **freedom and liberty**. There are those who feel that *all* decisions are a function of knowledge and understanding alone, derived from experience only (and now driven by AI). As long as we are good with data, then decisions (no matter how difficult) are possible from a dispassionate process. **We don't need ethics, values and virtues, they say. We don't need the Christian faith, or any faith.**

Here is a little test for you. Can you identify these words:

*Imagine there's no heaven; It's easy if you try  
No hell below us; Above us, only sky*

*Imagine there's no countries; It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for; And no religion too*

*Imagine no possessions; I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger; A brotherhood of man  
(John Lennon)*

Well it's an intriguing imagination, but it will never be reality. Have we, in this age of Enlightenment, been able to realize all this? I say, the world is a considerably more difficult place than it was when Lennon wrote these words in 1971.

**For Christians, the circle of life is so much more than a cold 360 degree feedback loop.** Jesus taught the unfortunate necessities of judgement because we are *not* logical, rational, fair or equal (and I doubt we ever shall be). **A good life with each other requires something more than just each other's rationale to ensure it.**

Christians hold that God also has full vision of our behaviour. Whether we like it or not, we *have* to be measured and judged in many different ways. Much of the deposit of our faith is to help us do that well, bringing *a*

*divine source* of justice, fairness and equality as *virtues* that must cut open the feedback loop and place them within our lives.

Well, I've said a lot there. But in the light of that let's look at the challenge that was put to Jesus when we heard our passage from Luke's gospel: a man in the crowd shouted out to Jesus 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'

I suspect that whoever this man was he recognised in Jesus a trustworthy, independent judge who could fairly settle a dispute he had with his brother. It sounds to me like he is trying to setup some meeting, perhaps with the three of them, to work out the inheritance question. That was the sort of thing a respected Rabbi might be asked to comment over.

**Well, I think that is to the man's credit because indeed we should be able to count Jesus as a trustworthy commentator upon the most difficult decisions of our lives.** Yet, Jesus is rarely drawn into worldly disputes like this, and throughout the gospels he seems to avoid being lured into taking sides over such visceral matters. 'Friend, Jesus says to him, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?'

Nevertheless, we ought not to discount so easily the notion that Jesus is uninterested in how we conduct our worldly affairs and set our values.

**History tells that Jesus is the greatest influence of all.** There is much in the current public discourse at the moment about 'lived values', in the way we Christians understand. Question such as do we even need a body of religious values, *or are we able to derive them from the lived result of being a progressive enlightened, rational and secular society?* Are universal values self-evident that we can arrive upon them, if only we look? **No, says the priest, for all the reasons I have said!**

Let me remind you of the story which brings colour to what Jesus was teaching that day:

'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" So he said to himself, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and

there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry.”

I hope this man had planning permission for his new barns. I hope he had carried out the statutory bat survey, fire safety zones, emergency access and flood drainage. **No one really likes such regulations.**

**‘He produced abundantly’**, so it was all his hard work right, his reward to take? Well yes perhaps, except he was able to do so inside an economy not of his creation. If you make it good yourself, is that not possible because there is a pre-existing stadium of life and society that you can base it all on? Those who make cars, didn’t provide the roads, they don’t maintain the highways, and they can’t be sure they will always be there.

**Freedom and equality sound like a lovely pair, but in a society without values, they lead only to greed and exploitation.** One person’s values are another person’s regulations. Society can seem like a sport without rules, and that is exactly what some would like. The brightest and the fittest will always gain the most and do their best to keep it. It hardly needs to be said, as Jesus teaches: **‘Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’**

And God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

If you want to leave sometime good in this world, then seek to keep a *greater value* than those things which you have accumulated or were given to you. **The values of the Christian faith, must be present if such good things as fairness, equality and justice are to be realized amongst us, and without which they just cannot be.**

Amen