



Painting: The Man Who Hoards by James Tissot. Brooklyn Museum.

Avoiding Foolishness

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT says that human centredness can distort our capacity to recognise that Earth's resources belong to all life.

The major feasts in our liturgical year are behind us and “ordinary time” stretches ahead until the celebration of the Universal or Cosmic Christ on 24 November. Each week we will read the Gospel of Luke which has the potential to draw us into new ecological perspectives.

Luke 12:13-21 on first reading is human-centred: divide the family inheritance with me; I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and many other examples. This is something we can relate to. But in *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis warns against modern anthropocentrism as one aspect which makes us unaware of our effect on Earth.

Human-centredness characterises the world view of the Graeco-Roman world, namely that the head of the Roman household had power over and ownership of both the people and property belonging to that household. This plays out in the story. The first human character we meet (Lk 12:13) wants Jesus to intervene in a dispute over a share in the family inheritance. Jesus's reply: “for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”, is preceded by warnings: “take care”, “be on your guard”. Jesus is critiquing the prevailing world view where property and possessions were considered to be “owned” by the head of the household.

Luke 12:13-21 Someone in the crowd said to Jesus: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him: “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 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.”

16 Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself: ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 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. 19 And I will say to my soul: ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry!’ 20 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?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”



Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.

We can hear this critique of Jesus in our contemporary world. We are warned to be "on our guard against all kinds of greed" – stockpiling of food, consumerism, privatising resources, hoarding. Indeed, the request of the man to "tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (Lk 12:13), could be a challenge coming from those who are denied adequate access to Earth's resources: food and water in particular.

Rather than have our attention absorbed by accumulating goods, we can be alert to the precarious hold we have on life — the call of death can come at any time.

These resources are the inheritance not only of the human community but of the whole Earth community. They need to be available equitably.

In the parable we see the perspective of unbridled human ownership, control and use of material resources. The man is described as "rich" – he owns and controls an abundance of material resources. The land itself is described as *his* land. The storage facilities are *his* and yet they are insufficient to store the crops that he describes as "my crops". His response to this situation of abundance is to demolish his barns and build larger ones to store the upcoming harvest.

Those who listened to the parable would have recognised their own situation in the story. The land that had once belonged to peasant farmers had been taken over by wealthy Romans – often absentee landlords or resident colonisers – like the landowner in the parable. They accumulated land and wealth, building up bigger and bigger estates, at the expense of the local people.

As we read the parable today, it can conjure up images of the extensive tracts of land owned and farmed by big companies who have the capacity to act like the "rich man" of the parable. In this way, a few become rich and like the man in the parable, are able to eat, drink, and celebrate their lifestyles.

The parable describes such an approach as foolishness because death can come at any time.

Rather than have our attention absorbed by accumulating goods, we can be alert to the precarious hold we have on life – the call of death can come at any time. Death is a part of life and goods are no insurance against it.

The parable critiques the accumulation of resources into the hands of a few. Rather food, clothing and a range of resources must be accessible to all in the human community. Indeed, such resources can have a dignity in their own right, not just in their usefulness to the human community.

Pope Francis said: "We cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships... Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God." 🌀

You are invited to

WOMEN'S HEART FOR MISSION

An interactive Retreat Day led by
ANN GILROY
Editor of Tui Motu

to be held 14 September 2019
9.30 am–4.30 pm
at the McFaddens Centre
64 McFaddens Road, Papanui, Christchurch
(entry and parking off Redwood Place)
Cost: \$50.00
Lunch, morning & afternoon tea provided
[Registration Form](#)

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Please return this form with a cheque for \$50.00 to Catholic Women's Movement P O Box 2184, Christchurch by 30 August 2019.

OR pay by internet banking – 0317-070043-199-00 – Please include your name and ref RETREAT and email your details to Helen at helenterry@slingshot.co.nz

Enquiries to: 021 133 5132 or 03 382 2302

Government for the Public Good: The Surprising Science of Large-Scale Collective Action

by Max Rashbrooke
Published by Bridget Williams
Book, 2018
Reviewed by Tui Bevin

BOOK

Government for the Public Good is a timely and helpful book given that confidence in governments like ours is low and the world's largest companies wield massive power. From a New Zealander's perspective, but utilising global evidence, this sweeping analysis of the role, effectiveness and possibilities of democratic governments explores how "more active government can help solve the big challenges of the twenty-first century".

Full of data, examples and analyses it focuses on the key areas of law and order, the environment, urban planning, basic infrastructure, health and education provision, and income, wealth and the economy. I was particularly interested in the discussions of innovative involvement of citizens in decision-making and public versus private ownership of public utilities.

While not a quick read, it is clearly written and free of jargon. Anyone wondering how we can manage the challenges of increasing inequity, climate change and developing a society where all can flourish will find plenty to ponder. The annotated bibliography and extensive endnotes will help readers wishing to look further. I don't know what I expected from this book, but I'm sure I didn't expect to find what I did: a feasible way forward to a just and sustainable future, and hope. 🌀

