August 3rd

THE NEW SHOFAR

The words which all of us shall one Day hear sound not of theology but of life, not of churches and saints, but of the hungry and the poor, not of creeds and doctrines, but of shelter and clothing, not of Bibles and prayer-books, but of cups of cold water in the name of Christ.

a Church noticeboard: Keep the Faith – but not to yourself

This reminded me of our Lord's words, "*You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (**Matt. 5:14, 16**). Too often we shorten the command- *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*-and miss the whole purpose of letting your light shine-so that men may *give glory to your father who is in heaven*.

All around us people are stumbling in spiritual and moral darkness. Jesus calls us to shine our light-our love, our compassion, our eagerness to serve others-into that darkness. He wants our light to show the way to him for those in darkness. Remember his words: *I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness* (**John 12:46**). Jesus also told us, *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world* (**John 9:5**). Here is the point the New Testament is making. Now that he is in heaven, he means other lights to shine for him in the world's darkness.

The Rich Fool sees things differently

This man comes to Jesus declaring *my brother to divide the inheritance with me!* This is not even a question. It is a demand, and Jesus seems a bit upset about it. Not surprisingly, because this is during Luke's equivalent of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is teaching significant spiritual matters. In fact, he had just finished giving instructions to the disciples about how they are to rely on the Holy Spirit when they face opposition. In terms of the gospel, this is very important advice. This makes the stranger's interruption the more striking.

This stranger had not been listening to Jesus at all! He had been too busy ruminating on his personal financial woes. He is the only character of the parable who does not have any obvious connection to anything spiritual whatsoever.

This man is completely out there on his own, doing his own thing with no reference to anything or anyone else. He is, Jesus says, a "fool." Biblically speaking, that is a potent word. In the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament a fool was anyone who fails to notice how the world works. Fools are the ones who spit into the wind, who saw off the branch they're sitting on, who are constantly trying to row their boat against the current because they simply do not pay attention to how life works. Fools are un-teachable. It's not only that they fail to make good

observations on what works and what does not, fools also refuse to listen when *others* point these things out for them. Fools, the saying goes, are often in error but never in doubt.

It's all about me!

This rich farmer is a fool not because he is wealthy or because he saves for the future, but because he lives only for himself, and because he believes that he alone can secure his life with his abundant possessions, through his own hard work. Note how it is that when the rich man talks in this parable, he talks only to himself, how the *only* person he refers to is himself: "What should ***I*** do, for ***I*** have no place to store ***my*** crops?" "***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, be merry').

The rich man's land has produced abundantly, yet he expresses no sense of gratitude to God for his good fortune, nor does he express any sense of gratitude to the workers who have helped him plant and harvest this bumper crop. It is all about him! He has more grain and goods in storage than he could ever hope to use yet seems to have no thought of sharing it with others, and no thought of what God might require of him. He is utterly blind to those around him. *It's all about him!*

This is the opposite of what the Gospel demands

The entire Gospel message is all about evangelism, something we are not very good at taking up. We all know the Great Commission: "***Go** . . . and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them** to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Matt. 28:19-20). Not wanting to be too negative, but it might seem to outsiders, that judging from the small number of new members we bring into the Church each year, one would think that for us the **Great Commission** might in fact be the **Great Omission**.

The purpose for which the Church exists ***is*** evangelization. The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make more urgent than ever. Evangelizing is in fact the vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists to evangelize, that is to say to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God. The entire witness of the Church is manifested in evangelization. To fail in this is to fail in being Church.

Some translations have God saying to the rich fool that "this night ***your life*** will be demanded of you." In the Greek, the word is the common word for "soul." These words remind us that it is the man's *soul* that is at risk. Jesus has taught that if you forfeit your *soul* for anything in this world, what could you ever give in exchange to get that soul back? Without knowing it, then, the rich fool is trafficking not in the mere physical things of this life but in eternal matters whose importance cannot be overstated. The one thing that may have saved him would have been his sharing of his abundant blessings with God and his neighbours.