

Thought for the Day 1st May 2020 from Hannah Lievesley

Bible reading - James 1:1-11

Rainy day riches.

⁹Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

The blossom is falling. There's been a sudden change in the weather. Not just meteorologically, but economically too. The rains have come. Many individuals and organisations will be feeling the financial hit of Coronavirus. Our own churches are particularly vulnerable as lockdown has decimated income from services and hall rental.

In his letter, James addresses a problem of financial inequality and attitudes to wealth within the Christian churches of his day. This is a major theme for him. Verses 9-11 express something of the idea coined 'The great reversal', that in the kingdom of heaven the humble poor will trade places with the rich. The poor will be lifted up in status and the rich cast down. The idea in verse 10, that 'the rich should take pride in their humiliation' seems odd at first, but not so odd if 'humiliation' is understood as a purposeful shedding of their wealth and status through generous giving. A few paragraphs on, James encourages just this course of action, pointing those harbouring wealth back to what he calls the Royal Law: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. (2:8)

I wonder how this translates into our support of other churches across Leeds? Currently, every church is asked to contribute a 'share' towards the cost of ministry in our region. The calculation is weighted, from those according to their means, to those according to their need, to ensure even the poorest parishes still receive ministry. As finances are squeezed in the wake of coronavirus I wonder how well we will remember that 'Royal Law', and honour our 'share'? For some it will be genuinely impossible. For some, frugally saved 'rainy-day' funds will need to be raided. And for others it will take great sacrificial generosity as we rise to the challenge of giving more.

Whichever of these applies to us, let's trust in the wisdom of God's 'Royal Law'.

