

A large white number '5' is centered on the left side of the page. The background is a teal color with a subtle, textured pattern. At the bottom of the page, there is a horizontal strip showing a beach scene with white waves crashing onto a sandy shore.

5

commonwealth

wealth and sharing resources

Opening Prayer

God, you heap your love upon us like a mother providing for her family's needs, embracing her child with tenderness.

*Forgive us
when, like spoilt children,
we treat your generosity as our right,
or hug it possessively to ourselves.*

*Give us enough trust to live secure in your love
and to share it freely with others in open-
handed confidence that your grace will never
run out. Amen*

Jan Berry, Sheffield

Reflection by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

“All the great religious traditions, in their several ways, insist that personal wealth is not to be seen in terms of reducing the world to what the individual can control and manipulate for whatever exclusively human purposes may be most pressing. Wealth is access to the ‘capital’ of the world as it is, access to the truth and reality that can be discovered when we are set free from our narrow and self-directed concerns – a discovery that both individuals and societies need to make. As such it is access to the depth of our own being, to the rich capacity of the world around to generate in us joy and amazement as well as practical sustenance, and to the final depth of reality which is the love of God as the source of all gifts.

What if we believed that the wealthy or secure person was one whose relationship with the environment was one in which actual enjoyment of and receptivity to the environment played the most significant part? This suggests something of a paradox. In order fully to access, enjoy and profit from our environment, we need to see it as something that does not exist just to serve our needs. Or, to put it another way, we are best served by our environment when we stop thinking of it as there to serve us. >>



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When we can imagine what is materially around us as existing in relation to something other than our own purposes, we are free to be surprised, educated and enlarged by it.

Christianity not only has its challenges in the Sermon on the Mount to anxiety about controlling the environment, prohibiting us from identifying wealth with possession; it also has its sacramental tradition which presents the material order as raw material for the communication of God's love – the Eucharist as the effective symbol of God's action in creating a radically different human society, not characterised by rivalry and struggle for resources. At the centre of Christian practice is a rite in which all are equally fed by one gift, and in which material things are identified symbolically with the self-offering of Christ.”





Going deeper

1. The Archbishop's definition of wealth is very different from that which immediately comes to mind.

How would you define wealth?

How does your relationship with the natural world enrich your life?

2. How do you react to the idea that the environment is not just there to serve our needs? What would it mean for humanity to 'rejoin the rest of creation'?

3. How does the pursuit of financial wealth and the enjoyment of great material possessions, impact on the environment?

Is this the main cause of environmental degradation?

4. Those concerned for social justice work to improve standards of living for those on low incomes.

Is this compatible with our critique of the pursuit of wealth?



Readings and Discussion

Read Acts 2:44-47

1. How can Christian faith communities today honour the example set by the early Church?
2. Are all Christians called to follow their example? What might the implications of this be?

Prayer

*Bread and wine;
gifts of God for the people of God.
May we who share these gifts
be found in Christ
and Christ in us*

ANZPB, p.472



Preparing for the Eucharist.

In your final session, you might like to conclude this study with Eucharist. If you do not have a priest, deacon or licensed lay minister in your group get in touch with your church office. They will be able to assist you with the organisation of the service.

In preparation for the Eucharist, and over the week to come, you might like to reflect on the following:

1. How does the Lord's Supper symbolise the relationship between humankind, creation, and God?
2. In what ways does our weekly celebration of the Eucharist challenge us to rethink the way we relate to the environment and each other?
3. How should we re-read the idea of humankind's dominion over God's creatures in Genesis 1:26-28 in light of the Lord's Supper and Jesus' death and resurrection?

Closing Prayer

*Christ of the poor,
forgive us for
keeping silence in the face of injustice
and for buying our dreams;
for not sharing bread and wine,
love and land,
among us, now.*

Prayer from Central America





Journal entry

1. Write a letter to a young person, real or imaginary, outlining your hopes for them in their life decisions about career choices and attitudes to wealth.