

There was an article in the Guardian newspaper a couple of years ago, written by a hospice nurse, on the five things people regretted most at the end of their lives. These regrets had nothing to do with barns full of stuff or any other financial or social achievements. Instead they were all about who they had been, and who they had failed to be.

The first was: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." People saw and deeply mourned that they had not lived true to their own truth, true to their own dreams. The second: "I wish I hadn't worked so hard." People, especially older men, regretted spending so much of their lives on job success and economic achievement. The third "I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings." Many felt they had buttoned down their true emotions to fit in with others and keep the peace, and so had never experienced life in an open heart-strong way. The fourth and fifth seem the simplest and saddest of all "I wish that I had stayed in touch with my friends" and "I wish that I had let myself be happier."

"I wish that I had let myself be happier". This evening's two Bible readings reflect this basic truth of human existence – that meaning and value never lie in what we accumulate but in who we become. Jesus in Luke's gospel calls it 'being rich towards God'. Being rich towards God means being the person God created us to be – living into our own unique identity, valuing ourselves for who we are rather than what we do, expressing our feelings fully and not being afraid to love, building strong lasting relationships, and allowing ourselves to be joyful, thankful, laughing creatures.

These are the things that stop life being mere vanity and a waste of divine breath. These are the building blocks of a life that we can leave knowing our time has been blessed and we have been a blessing to others. Don't let yourself become rich in possessions and poor towards God. Don't allow the fog of the demands of daily living to obscure this core divine and human truth: God created you to add to the delight of the world. So, in the words of poet Mary Oliver: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"