

**Readings: Amos 5:6, 7, 10-15; Mark 10: 17-31**

### **The tale of the monkey with the clenched fist**

The story is told of the monkey who was out one day looking for food and came across a dried up riverbed. As he walked along he saw there was a deep pit. He jumped down into it to investigate. In the side of the pit he spotted a small hole. He peered inside and could see something that looked good to eat. Perhaps they were nuts!

He slid his paw into the hole and grabbed hold of what he had seen. It was nuts. Mmm! These were going to taste good. He held onto them tightly in his fist. Just then he heard the sound of rain and running water.

‘Oh dear!’ the monkey thought. ‘The river is starting to fill up again. I’d better be off! But I’ve just got time to eat those nuts. He tried to pull his hand out, but it was stuck. That’s strange – he’d put it inside easily enough! But now that the nuts were tightly grasped in his tight little fist he couldn’t get his hand out.

Oh no! The water started to trickle down beside him into the deep pit! Well, he’d just pull his hand out and eat up those nuts and he’d be gone. He pulled and he pulled and he pulled. He even had his feet up on the wall pulling as hard as he could. The water was rising in the pit. Soon it would be up to his waist. What was he going to do?

The only safe option was to leave the nuts in the hole, release his paw and escape from the rising water. He’d lose the nuts but gain something much more valuable – his life!

### **Jesus’ story of the rich man with the clenched fist**

This story sheds light on today’s Gospel reading, the account of Jesus’ encounter with a rich man who asked Jesus: “What must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus challenged him: “Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come with me.” Very sadly, the rich man found it hard to loosen his grip on his great wealth to gain eternal life, and so even more sadly lost eternal life. Jesus said it was terribly hard to get into God’s kingdom, in fact he said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into God’s kingdom.

In our Old Testament reading, Amos challenged the people of Judah to live as God's holy people by choosing good not evil. It was a challenge to speak out and stand up for the rights of the oppressed, the crushed, the broken in spirit – a challenge to leave the callous rich out in the cold and to sit the starving poor down to a banquet – a challenge to oppose those who bully right-living people, take bribes right and left and kick the poor when they're down – a challenge to create justice and joy which is the way really to live. In short, don't grasp at money – loosen your grip and give it away to the poor. It was the same sort of challenge Jesus gave to the rich man!

### **Unclenching our fists for God**

And today God calls us to unclench our fists for him in our daily lives, to work out what this means in Penicuik and beyond, to seek ways of being generous and open to sharing, to follow paths of creating justice and joy. He calls us as a congregation as well as individuals not to be people with clenched fists, but to be open-hearted and open-handed with money. And he calls us as he called the people of Judah and the rich man to walk with God, doing what is true and just, showing mercy and compassion and lifting up the weak and poor.

And let's end with a moment of silent prayer, each one of us and all of us together asking God to show us how to turn all this into a living reality this week and into the future.