

Something to think about: 1 August 2011

Is it about just 'about me' or are we in it together?

There is a text in the Bible that we do not often focus on. It requires land-owning wheat and barley growers to instruct their reapers not to gather in the grains to the very edge of the crop; to leave enough for those in need to gather their requirements for life. This passage is clear about the ethical responsibilities of care in a society even without a social welfare system. That ethic to care for all is no less relevant for us today that it was 2000 years ago. I am at a loss to understand why, in our so-called developed nation, some of our wealthiest capitalists (those who accrue wealth through the investment of money and not by direct labour) believe it to be their right not to pay taxes like the rest of us. They use our roads and core medical services, our education system and legal system; they benefit like the rest of us from our human rights commission and other groups set up to monitor the quality of our wellbeing and social relationships. Have we slipped so far down the ladder of individualism that we have no sense of community left? When I learned that NZ is one of only two OECD countries that does not have some level of capital gains tax, then the threats of those who oppose paying tax to 'go off shore with their wealth' sound very hollow. It is heartening to me, therefore, that the despair I feel - when I hear this particular group espouse their sense of entitlement - is tempered by a warm sense of goodwill when I hear other wealthy people say, 'Yes, we should pay our share of tax on unearned profit, we should contribute to this country that we have benefitted from.' So while it may be difficult to come to terms with this particular new tax, and it will require some planning in the interests of future generations and the social infrastructure that supports us all, I think a capital gains tax timely especially if it enables the removal of GST on fresh fruit and vegetables and enable some, less well off than me to a better living.

Susan