

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 3 August 2025 - The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Lectioary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Ecclesiastes 1.2, 12-14; 2.18-23; Psalm 49.1-12 [or 49.1-9]; Colossians 3.1-11; Luke 12.13-21

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Iain Osborne, Senior Chaplain and Strategy Advisor to the Acting Bishop of Ely

Let's think about Jesus' story about the man piling up wealth in his barns. Let's ask some "hands-up" questions about that gospel story.

- Who thinks the gospel story might be mainly about farmers?

Well, I suppose it could be, because they are the people who own barns. But Jesus tells lots of farming stories that have a much wider meaning; I don't think this is mainly about farming.

- Who thinks the story might be mainly about billionaires, like Elon Musk or other tech billionaires?

We live at a time when some people are piling up extraordinary large fortunes. Actually, that's how it was in Jesus's day as well. So, maybe he did have people like that in mind.

- Another question (and you don't have to put your hand up for this one)... Who thinks the story might be about them?

In one sense, it surely is. Whatever our personal views or habits, you and I live in a society that is organised and powered by the accumulation of wealth. Without either praise or criticism, this is simply a fact. The clue is in the name, 'capitalism': our society is all about accumulating and using capital. We might or might not feel this is a good thing. There are some obvious pros and cons to capitalism. But what matters for now is to understand that this system influences how we think.

The strongest influence on human beings is usually what we think everyone else is doing - what we might call 'social norms' – and capitalism sets some strong norms. It tells us that it is normal to heap up wealth, and when our barn is full, we're encouraged to build a bigger barn. We think it's normal and sensible to buy a house if you can, and to up-size over time; it's a way to accumulate wealth, and that's what we do. It's normal in our society to accumulate money and then retire on it; it's what we do, and we'd feel jolly cross if our savings were taken away. People who live in 21st century Britain are likely to feel that what is normal is to keep buying, keep saving, keep accumulating.

Which is all very well, until as Christians we start to realise that Jesus' idea – the Bible's idea – of normal behaviour is completely different. That is partly because the social structure was different. Jesus did not live in a capitalist society, but in one based on farming and trading. The aim of ordinary people was to survive, not to accumulate. When people grew rich in the ancient world, it was generally through violence and by robbing ordinary people. That is essential background to understanding why Jesus' teaching about wealth is so relentlessly negative.

Recognising that Jesus was speaking about a different social structure, what does this story say to us about how we should behave? Let's look at the punchline. It has two parts: God speaks to this rich man; and then Jesus adds a commentary.

So, first, God says "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" The man is a fool because he has not been living in reality. He thought that piles of wealth would keep him safe and happy, but that was a fantasy. The condemnation is not particularly about wealth in itself, so much as about building one's life on an illusion.

Second, Jesus comments: "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." So, Jesus' invitation is for us to use our money so as to become rich toward God.

Let's repeat that: to use our money so as to become rich toward God. What does that look like?

It is not the same for everyone.

Some people are called to true poverty – holy poverty, as we might say. To own as close to nothing as is consistent with survival. Those people have always joined together so as to help one another, in monasteries or convents. The individual monks or nuns can own essentially nothing themselves, as the community feeds and clothes them. The testimony of holy poverty through history is that it offers a life of joy and freedom. No wealth, no anxiety. This is a way of life that makes absolutely no sense unless God is God, and in that sense is a huge gamble on God. This is one way to be rich toward God.

However, such poverty rules out other things. You can't take responsibility for a family if you are utterly poor, for instance. Relatively few of us are called by God to that life – more of us, to lives where we care for a family, or run businesses, or grow food on a farm, or serve as teachers or nurses... What does it look like for people living that kind of ordinary life, to use our money so as to become rich toward God?

Well, first we need to get our heads out of the social norm, that more-and-more is better-and-better. The most important word for Christians, with regard to money, is "enough." Know what is enough for you. I do not mean what is enough for all you want – social norms inflate our desires essentially infinitely – but what you need. Not what you need to live miserably, but with dignity. Once you have understood your own needs... then use the rest to care for others, or give it away.

God places money into our hands. God entrusts us with money. He does this, so that we can use it well, and in the process develop in generosity and love. God wants us to use

money to meet our own needs. But when He gives us a surplus, it is so we can use it to show generosity or love.

It would be glib to pretend that this is easy. It means fighting against the social conditioning in our heads, and it is hard. To downsize from a big house that we don't need, and to give the money away rather than spending it on ourselves or our family. To give money away instead of having an expensive holiday. Our society believes these are the acts of fools.

God knows it isn't easy, and we can't always manage it, so let us remember God's love and mercy to us. But let us remind one another frequently that how people live in our society is foolish. The life of accumulation and consumption is built on an illusion; it is unsafe, it harms us and others.

On the other hand, giving is nice. It feels good. A life of generosity and love will be a life that feels rich, safe, connected, meaningful.

Do you want to be rich with God? Then stop thinking you can live forever. Stop trying to die rich. Give, care, love.

Ways to Engage all Generations

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder how many t-shirts (say) you are wearing now? How many have you got at home? How many do you need?
- How could the man in the story have used all that food, instead of just keeping it in barns?
- What did the man in the story think was going to happen next year, or the year after? Do you think he believed he was going to get richer and richer forever?
- Is it easy to give your money or nice things away? What does it feel like?

Suggested intercessions

- For everyone who is relying on money to keep them safe. That they might meet with enough love so as to be rescued from that illusion.
- That rich people may be saved through generosity and become rich with God. That God might help them to pay their taxes cheerfully.
- For this community, that we might share with other cheerfully, so that no-one in this [parish, village, place] should be anxious or go without.
- For political leaders, that they might lead us towards a kinder and fairer society, not necessarily a richer one.
- That the whole world might learn what is 'enough' for us to live well and might be rescued from our ever-growing desires.
- That we might stop harming the planet out of careless greed. Pray for activists and campaigners who are trying to alert the world to the disaster we are creating.

Suggested hymns/songs

- Take my life, and let it be
- Seek ye first the Kingdom of God
- All my hope in God is founded
- Teach me, my God and King
- O Jesus, I have promised

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)