

The rich fool sermon for July 31st 2022 Luke 12 v13-21

Here in today's gospel reading we find Jesus once again busy teaching the huge crowds who followed him everywhere. Suddenly he's rudely interrupted by one of them calling out, asking Jesus to settle a financial dispute between him and his brother. Jesus refuses to get involved in the family squabble and instead he uses the situation as an opportunity to teach about the seduction of wealth.

Notice that he's not saying there's anything wrong with wealth in itself. It's our attitude towards it that he's challenging.

First, let's look a bit more closely at the parable. It's usually called the parable of the rich fool.

So why is the rich farmer a fool? Not because he's wealthy or because he saves for the future, but because he appears to live only for himself, and especially because he believes that he can secure his life with his possessions.

When the rich man talks in this parable, he talks only to himself, and the only person he refers to is himself: "What should *I* do, for *I* have no place to store *my* crops?" "*I* will do this: *I* will pull down *my* barns and build larger ones, and there *I* will store all *my* grain and goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up **for many years**; relax, eat, drink, be merry'" (12:17-19).

The rich man's land has produced magnificently, yet he expresses no sense of gratitude to God or to the workers who've helped him plant and harvest this bumper crop. He has more grain and goods in storage than he could ever hope to use, yet he seems to have no thought of sharing it with others, and no thought of what God might require of him. He's simply determined to squirrel every last grain away even though he clearly doesn't need it, rather than giving to the poor- -and there were plenty of them in that society- -or even making it available to the market, He's blind to the fact that his life is not his own to secure, that his life belongs to God, and that God can demand it back at any time.

The rich man learns the hard way quite simply, that you can't take it with you when you go. There are no pockets in shrouds.

We're bombarded by marketing wizards whose job it is to convince us of all the products we **need to complete our lives**. They try to make us feel that we never have enough, no matter what we buy or own. Scams abound trying to make us dissatisfied with our money and ready to take crazy risks to make more. No one is untouched by concerns about money – do we have enough, too much, how

does it relate to our faith, how do we teach our children values about wealth – and our culture offers woefully inadequate advice to address our concerns.

Of course, in these hard times many people are struggling financially so of course they are very concerned. Jesus is not condemning working hard and trying to make ends meet or hopefully save for a rainy day. It's about how we can easily fall into the trap of thinking that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us **secure**. **About the ultimate futility of choices made in isolation from the love of God and neighbour.**

Sooner or later, we learn that no amount of wealth or property can **secure** our lives. No amount of wealth can protect us from a genetically inherited disease, for instance, or from a tragic accident. No amount of wealth can keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart. In fact, wealth and property can easily drive a wedge between family members, as in the case of the brothers fighting over their inheritance at the beginning of our reading. Most importantly, no amount of wealth can **secure** our lives with God. In fact, Jesus repeatedly warns that wealth can actually get in the way of our relationship with God if we're not careful. "Take care!" he says. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (12:15).

It's not that God doesn't want us to save for retirement or future needs. It's not that God doesn't want us to "eat, drink, and be merry" and enjoy the good things he's given us. All four gospel writers tell us that Jesus spent time eating and drinking with people and enjoying life. In fact, he was criticised for it by the religious authorities who wanted to bring him down. But Jesus was also clear about where his true security lay.

It's all about priorities. It's about who is truly God in our lives. It's about how we invest our lives and the gifts that God has given us. It's about how our lives are fundamentally aligned: are we totally focussed on ourselves and our desires, or towards God and our neighbour?

While preparing this sermon I came across this quote from a Christian pastor. He said, "I've heard many different regrets expressed by people nearing the end of life, but there's one regret I've never heard expressed. I've never heard anyone say, 'I wish I hadn't given so much away. I wish I'd kept more for myself.'" Death has a way of clarifying what really matters."

I'll tell you a true story about two brothers I know. When they were in their prime the younger one fell in love with someone whose faith his parents disapproved of. They didn't disapprove of the girl herself, only of her catholic faith. They told him he had to choose between her and them, wisely he chose

her and they had a very happy marriage. When the parents became old and frail and one of them had dementia the elder son had to take responsibility and when they died he was named as executor of the will and the sole heir. There was not a huge amount and he himself wasn't wealthy. He could have legally taken everything but he deliberately chose not to. He told his brother that the will made them joint heirs, everything fifty fifty, and he never ever told him the actual hurtful truth. ..that he had been disinherited because of his love for his wife. That elder brother was rich in God indeed and all the happier and at peace in his heart because of it.

Our lives and possessions are not our own. We are merely stewards of them for the time God has given us on this earth. We rebel against this truth because we want to be in total control of our lives and our stuff.

Yet this truth is actually good news. Because all that we are and all that we have belongs to God, our future is secure beyond all measure.

After telling the story of the rich fool Jesus moves on from the greed and God-less treasure of the parable. With a shift in his focus we find ourselves thinking about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. We turn towards the values of God's kingdom and the fullness of life, which we already know is rooted in wholehearted love of God and neighbour. In this alternative message about God's faithfulness, Jesus recognizes that what underlies excessive accumulation is most often anxiety and fear. So he offers the antidote to accumulation of too much empty treasure in the promise that it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom itself to his little flock. And the way to collect treasure of the heart suitable for that kingdom isn't the earthbound, inward-looking way of the rich fool but the soaring, beautiful way of the one who lives and loves generously, and with joy.

The way to true freedom and peace of mind lies in living from day to day in right relationship with God and our neighbour, whatever our circumstances.

I'd like to end by inviting you to join with me in the living God's love prayer.