

Sam Wells currently Vicar of St Martin in the Fields wrote about this passage from Luke some years ago and is the source of some of my remarks today.

Jesus is pretty rather tough on the rich in the gospels, especially Luke. It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, remember, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. No one can serve God and Mammon. And here in Luke 12, in today's gospel, we have a parable in which a rich man says to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? I will pull down my barns and build larger ones." And God calls him an idiot and takes his life the very same night.

Let's consider this parable. The things the rich man gets wrong can help us in thinking about wealth and its problems.

- First of all the rich man forgets God. He forgets God because he assumes all his wealth belongs to him and that he will possess it indefinitely. It turns out his wealth is in fact on loan from God, and God can have it back at any moment. This is a rebuff for any view of society that prizes private property. Notice how the rich man likes the word "my." *My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul* he says, all in the space of a couple of verses. But the parable makes it clear that all these things belong to God, and the rich man only has them out on loan. *Abundance turns to greed* the moment the rich man forgets that everything he has belongs to God.
- And the second thing the rich man forgets is everyone but himself. Instead of pausing at the point when he has more than enough, and wondering who else might welcome a little bit more, he presses on and builds bigger barns. And it turns out that the conversations he should have been having with friends and neighbours, the wise and the needy, he is in fact having just with himself. "He thought to himself," says the parable, and then again "He said to himself." *Abundance turns to greed* the moment the rich man assumes wealth exists to insulate him from other people, rather than to draw him closer to them.
- This parable shows us what greed is. Greed seeks for more without asking what the more is for. Greed is so dazzled by what money can do that it is content to accumulate, without ever investing. Greed stops seeing money as a means to an end and instead sees wealth as an end in itself.

There's nothing wrong with being rich so long as you remember that the things that really matter can't be bought.

- Money can't buy eternal life.
- Money can't buy the forgiveness of sins.
- Money can't buy the faith that moves mountains.
- Money can't buy the hope that walks in rhythm with God's step.
- Money can't buy the love that will not let you go.

These are things that everyone can have but no one can buy. The poor are blessed because on the whole they know this. The rich can sometimes be forgetful.

Tom Wright the theologian and former Bishop of Durham describes the modern world as being built on anxiety. We see it on the faces of people hurrying to work, and even more as they journey home, exhausted but still concerned with life's problems. The faces are weary, puzzled, coping with the unanswerable question as to what it all means. The world seems to thrive on people setting higher and higher targets for themselves and others. Then they worry about how they will reach them. If they do reach them, new goals will be set and if they don't, they will feel they have failed. Is this really how we are supposed to live our lives?

Jesus's warnings in today's gospel indicate that much of the world for many centuries has faced this same problem. But in Jesus' time life was more precarious - many had only just enough to live on and if the man of the house was ill or injured the family would become destitute. As with many in the non-western world today a serious accident could cause a household to become penniless almost overnight.

The man who wanted Jesus to arbitrate in a property dispute with his brother was typical in his attitude towards the Holy Land. This Land was not just where they happened to live; in the first century, as now, possession of the Land was a vital Jewish symbol. Families clung to their inheritance for religious reasons as well as economic ones.

Jesus' message is that God is changing all that. God was longing to shower his grace and new life on people of every race and place - not just the Jews. God wants us to share his bounty with our families and with all those around us.

The man in today's gospel wanted the security of enough possessions to last a very long time. It can be easy to find ourselves in that same situation. God's short sharp response to that is: You fool! Life isn't like that. The Kingdom of God isn't like that. What is the Kingdom of God like? It is about GOD's SOVEREIGNTY in extending his love and power to all the world. Then we human beings, created in God's image and loved by him, do not need to be anxious. We can relax in the knowledge that God is in control. The Kingdom of God brings the values and priorities of God himself to bear on the greed and anxiety of the world. Those who welcome Jesus and his kingdom-message must learn to abandon the greed and anxiety of the world and live by God's values and priorities.

And the message of Paul to the new Christians in Colossae re-enforces what Jesus has been saying. As Christians you must turn your backs on the old ways; a whole new pattern of behaviour is now required. And this new moral code is based on truth. What we must do is take off the old clothes, the old human nature, and put on the new clothes, the new pattern of behaviour instead. What God wants for us is that our hearts should be renewed and redirected to all that is of true and lasting value, so that Christ is all in all.

Amen