

Sermon for 3rd August 2025, Year C, Pentecost 8

Preached at St John's Baillieston

Luke 12:13-21

Sermon

The careful savers among us might read today's gospel and wonder what exactly is the problem with a farmer building bigger barns to store up resources during the bountiful times so that there's more available when times are difficult? Frugal people – and I was certainly taught by my parents to be frugal – frugal people have long saved for rainy days, and carefully put away money for retirement and for their children and grandchildren, and been praised for doing so.

Wasn't this also exactly what Joseph advised Pharaoh to do in Egypt when he dreamed of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine? If that careful preparation was seen as wise, why is Jesus suddenly telling his followers that such forward planning is not necessary and could even be seen as disrespectful of God's role in providing for the needs of his creation?

And why shouldn't someone celebrate good fortune by eating, drinking and being merry? There are any number of feasts in the Bible where people celebrate their good fortune. It's likely that Jesus even attended a few. He certainly made the wedding at Cana go with a swing!

To figure out this conundrum, we probably need to take a closer look at what Jesus is criticising and why he's doing it.

The context is that a man in the crowd following Jesus has just appealed to him to tell his brother to share their family inheritance. As I understand it, according to Jewish law at the time, the eldest brother would gain two thirds of the family inheritance, with the younger brother receiving one third. This therefore sounds

like an appeal perhaps by the younger brother that the elder should share what he has received from the family estate.

In response, Jesus refuses to get involved, but instead tells this story about the rich man who pulls down his barns to build bigger ones, not realising that his life is about to come to an end and all his earthly riches are about to be totally irrelevant. “Whose will they be?” Jesus asks, because you certainly can’t take them with you.

And then comes the key phrase which tells us what Jesus is really asking of us: “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.” The problem is not necessarily the new barns, or even the fact that the landowner is rich; the problem is that he is so focussed on himself and his own personal wealth that he is not at all rich towards God – he doesn’t think of God at all.

In both the English translation and the original Greek, the parable is full of ‘I,’ ‘me,’ ‘my.’ “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 *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul, Soul, *you* have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

There is no concern in this man’s response for anyone other than himself. Even when he says the word ‘you,’ he’s still talking to his own soul! He shows no concern for his neighbours, those who can’t afford land or any barns at all, let alone bigger ones. He shows no concern for the foreigner, the immigrant, the widow, the sick, or the orphan on the margins of society. He doesn’t even show any interest in providing for his own family. He intends to spend his wealth on himself - eating, drinking and being merry.

Not only has the man ignored all the people around him, but he has also forgotten that God’s hand is instrumental in everything he has received. As far

as he is concerned, his good fortune is entirely his own doing! Nowhere does he think to offer thanks to God.

And thirdly, the man has forgotten that all life comes to an end, even his own, and often entirely unexpectedly. Sooner or later, death will permanently separate him from his wealth, and then all that matters will be whether he is rich towards God.

But what does it mean to be rich towards God?

In the gospel reading, Jesus doesn't really give us a definite answer to this question, but according to many of Jesus' parables, it often seemed to involve making yourself more vulnerable, or less wealthy, for the sake of someone else.

In the passage that follows this one, Jesus tells us to sell our possessions and give to the poor, so that we will have an unfailing treasure in heaven, where it cannot ever be stolen. There is no real escape from that one. Being rich towards God means supporting others with what we possess, knowing full well that what we have came from God in the first place. It's why a priest often speaks these words over the offering – be it bread, wine, or money – “All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.”

Luke's gospel, with its continuous focus on Jesus' support for the poor, has many passages that connect richness towards God with generosity with our possessions, be they time or money. In the parable of the Good Samaritan from chapter ten, the Samaritan is rich towards God despite being a social and religious outcast, because he cares for the injured man and pays for his recovery. Also in chapter ten, Mary of Bethany is considered rich towards God because she chooses to spend her time learning from Jesus, despite being a woman in a patriarchal society. In chapters eleven and twelve we learn that being rich towards God also consists of trusting in God first and foremost, rather than relying only on our own ability. We must remember that our abilities, like our

possessions, are also given to us by God. That's why we call our natural talents, 'gifts,' even if we've practiced very hard to improve them.

According to Jesus, our gratitude towards God is what actually creates the kingdom of God around us. If we live in a community where everyone is always thinking first of others, then that mindset of generosity will not only make us ready for heaven, but will create a foretaste of heaven right here among us.

And this is probably why we're here in church, today. We want to be kind and generous and loving, and we want to live in a place where others are like that too. Church communities are places where we can encounter God's love for us, but also where we can meet others with whom we can practice the generosity, forgiveness, and compassion to which God is calling us.

So, there are always these two sides to faith: firstly, to experience God's love and be transformed by forgiveness and a welcome we didn't deserve, and then to offer that same forgiveness and unconditional love to those around us. The kingdom of heaven appears among us, not when we're all floating around on the afterglow of meeting God in the bread and wine, but when we are able to truly love and care for those we secretly, or openly, think don't deserve it. Otherwise, we are all simply building barns to hoard the love God has given us. But love cannot be hoarded; to flourish and grow it must be shared and given away.