

Year C Proper 18, 3rd August 2025, St Mungo's
Ecclesiastes 1: 2 & 12-14, 2:18-23. Colossians 3:1-11. Luke 12:13-21.

Money, money, money
Must be funny, in the rich man's world Money, money,
money
Always sunny in the rich man's world Ah-ha, all the
things I could do
If I had a little money, it's a rich man's world It's a rich man's
world.

As I'm sure you all probably know, that is the chorus from Abba's famous
song Money, Money, Money

Jesus does go on about money, doesn't he? He talks about money almost more
than about anything else and he's at it again in our Gospel reading.

To be fair to Jesus, he is speaking in response to someone looking for help to
ensure he gets his share of the family inheritance from his older brother.
Now, it was quite normal in those days for people to look to rabbis to
adjudicate on those sorts of matters.

What we don't know is whether the man's request is motivated by the fact
that his brother wasn't being fair in the distribution of the inheritance - in
any event, the oldest male would get a double portion - or whether the
younger brother was just being greedy. Jesus seems to think the man is being
greedy and reminds him that life isn't about the abundance of one's
possessions.

Either way Jesus didn't want to get involved in a family dispute.

Nevertheless, it gave him the opportunity to remind his listeners of the
dangers of money. It was not that Jesus was against money. After all, he was
supported financially by wealthy women and there is no suggestion anywhere
in the Gospels that he supported himself by using his carpentry skills in the
way that Paul did with his tent making. And of course we have the parable of
the talents.

And we know of course that money pays for things the community needs
such as education and healthcare, two areas of common need where it was
the Church that led the way

But we have plenty of examples in Luke's Gospel of God's concern of what money can do to people. As well as this parable, we have the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In Mary's Magnificat the rich are sent empty away. In Luke's version of the Beatitudes, it says what sorrow awaits you who are rich for you only have your happiness now, what sorrow awaits you who are fat and prosperous now, for a time of awful hunger awaits you.

And of course there is the rich ruler who asks Jesus how to achieve eternal life and who then turns away in sorrow when he finds the answer is to give away all his possessions.

With all that it is little wonder that here we get the parable of the rich fool as it's described. We are presented with a rich landowner who's clearly enjoyed a bumper harvest to extent he's got more grain than he can store.

So he decides to build new and bigger barns so that he can enjoy retirement and as he puts it, relax, eat, drink and be merry. It's all about me, me, me, without any thought for his family - if he has any- any thought for his workers, and certainly any thought for the providence of God, which has enabled his very abundant crop.

But before he can enjoy any of this new-found wealth which presumably would have been realised by selling off the grain, God tells him that's it, his life is coming to an end right now. I think the writer of Ecclesiastes could have been thinking of this farmer when he wrote all is vanity, a chasing after the wind.

As the saying goes, a shroud has no pockets and we can't take anything with us when we die, and not only that we have no idea what the people inheriting the money will do with it. It's interesting, isn't it that a lot of very rich people have said publicly they have no intention of leaving all their money to their children because they know the harm it can do, and instead they set up charitable foundations designed to benefit humanity as a whole.

This farmer reminds me of John D. Rockefeller, the American who, when asked how much money was enough replied 'always a little more'. When you're as rich as he was, someone who would have had no difficulty paying any bill, the only response to that surely is why? On the other hand, we live in a society that tells us that we need more of everything, especially money

and more generally 'stuff' to make our lives happier.

Both in this parable and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, I think Jesus is pointing to the risk that we define our success and worth by the size of our bank balance and our house, our car and so on and so on - all of which requires money, then money is in danger of becoming the idol we worship most.

And money and stuff and bigger barns aren't really the things that make us happy. The United States is the richest nation on earth, but it's also one of the unhappiest.

Maybe the Beatles were speaking the truth more than they realised when they sang, 'Cause I don't care too much for money, money can't buy me love.' It certainly can't buy God's love or human love for that matter

Because money is not how God measures our worth, if indeed he measures it at all. What God is interested in is are we rich towards God. I don't think that is measured by how much we give to the Church, or even to Christian charities, good as those things are.

I think it has much more to do with our attitude to other people, especially those on the margins, those less fortunate than ourselves. As Jesus says in the parable of the sheep and the goats, when we feed the hungry, provide drink for the thirsty, give clothes to those needing clothes, look after the ill and so on, that's when we are being rich towards God.

The problem with money is that it creates the illusion of independence, but money can't guarantee that you won't get a life-threatening illness for which there is no known cure. Money can't guarantee we won't die in a freak accident. Winning life's lottery in the genes we inherit and a sensible lifestyle give us a better chance of dealing with the vulnerabilities of old age than any amount of money.

As churches, we need to reflect how much time and money we spend on preserving our barns or even on building bigger and better barns. Is that being rich towards God?

Perhaps we could now spend a little time discussing what we think being rich towards God means.