

## Luke 12:13-21

Apologies to you all! If you read *Sunday to Sunday*, this is your second sermon on money this week! And (this really is deserving of an apology) your second preacher's joke about money this week! But here goes!

*A pastor decided a better strategy for meeting the church budget than threatening the congregation with longer sermons (you need to have read the first joke) was 'incentivisation' so he offered whoever gave the most money the chance to pick out three hymns.*

*This was in the days when we still had offering plates - and cheques! - and the pastor looked down while giving thanks for the offering and saw a cheque for \$10,000. He was so excited he asked if he could publicly thank the person who'd written that cheque.*

*A very saintly elderly woman in the back of the church shyly raised her hand, and the pastor asked her to come to the front and expressed his great thanks for her wonderful generosity and asked her to pick out three hymns.*

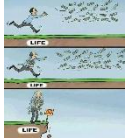
*Her eyes lit up as she looked over the congregation, and she said, "I'll take him and him and him!" (Bad on so many levels!)*



What is interesting, however, is reflecting on my feeling that I should apologise for preaching – twice in one week – about money! The feeling that talking about money is too difficult – too sensitive – too personal – and too compromising - a topic to tackle. Because, as in our opening liturgy, sometimes I'm clear about which side I'm on and sometimes I'm not! Sometimes I know exactly what Jesus would say about my money (my money?) and sometimes the other side makes sense as well. Sometimes I live, as Jesus teaches, simply, thankfully, generously, and sometimes I do not.

In many ways, I (and many of you) are like the man in this parable. We are resourceful, aren't we, and we work hard and we, mostly, make good sensible financial decisions. (Aron might disagree with me.) But there is nothing in these verses that says that this man gains his wealth in some dishonest way or by exploiting others. He is just a wealthy man with an abundant crop who makes what seem to be reasonable plans to store it so he can enjoy it and have security in the future.

Except for one thing - the disturbing use of pronouns in this parable. Not him, him, and him, but I (eight times in the Greek) and my (five times in these verses)! Listen to the man's conversation with 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 *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul..."



The not-so-subtle indication here – *“You fool!” ...God says to him* – is that his focus on himself, and his own wealth, has actually impoverished him – deprived him of a life of being rich towards others, rich towards God and even personally enriching. *“Life does not consist,”* Jesus says, *“in the abundance of possessions.”*

By way of contrast, in Luke 19, Zacchaeus, another wealthy man, gives generously to the poor, generously to those he has defrauded, and Jesus declares, *“Today salvation – wholeness and healing – genuine life – has come to this house.”*

We must *‘take care!’* Jesus says in this passage; we must *‘be on our guard’* against all kinds of greed – the sense of the word is to take positive action to ward off a foe - because greed, the love of money, is a power that seeks to control and dominate us.

*“Money,”* Richard Foster, writing in the Quaker tradition, says, *“is not willing to rest contented in its proper place alongside other things we value.... And this does not occur just among the poor and starving. Quite to the contrary – the super wealthy, who have really nothing to gain by more money, still seek it furiously. The middle class, who are really quite adequately cared for (and who are from a global perspective the wealthy), continue to buy more houses than they need, to acquire more cars than they need, to have more clothes than they need.”* Ouch! That does hit home.

Foster makes seven suggestions for being ‘on guard’ against greed, though he says, as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 9:7, that we must not act *“regretfully or under compulsion”*; that this is something each of us work out in dialogue with God; *“through the filter of your...unique personality and circumstances.”*

**First, he says, let us get in touch with our own feelings about money.** We may fear not having enough. We may fear having too much. We may fear others judging us for having too much. *“Our parents may have had anxieties about money that we have made our own. We may have fears that stem from watching the absurdities to which some people have taken the teaching of Jesus.... It is only as we come to terms with these [emotions]... that we can act upon the biblical call to righteousness.”*

**Second, let us realistically acknowledge our wealth.**

I was looking at the statistics this week on Effective Altruism Australia. Earning A\$95,000 a year post-tax places you in the top 1% of global earners. Even earning the average income of A\$55,000 places you in the top 4% of income-earners worldwide, and these numbers already take into consideration the costs of goods and services and the cost-of-living crisis.

Realistically acknowledging our wealth is not so we feel guilty, but so we have an accurate picture of our world. We are wealthy. *“The very fact you were able to purchase [my] book,” Foster writes, “probably puts you among the world’s wealthy. The very fact I had the time to write [a] book puts me in the same category.”* We need to be able to acknowledge our wealth so *“we are in a position to conquer it and use it for God’s good purposes.”* As someone earning an average income and living in a rich country, Effective Altruism Australia says, giving *“is your superpower for doing good”*.

**Third, let us create an atmosphere in the church where we can freely confess the hold that money has over us.** Much of our church teaching on money is to condemn it or to praise it, but not to help people relate to it.

**Fourth, let us find someone close to us, perhaps a partner, perhaps a close friend, who can – in a spirit of love and graciousness – support us** (and we can support them) in the challenge of offering our finances to God.

*“Perhaps,” says Foster, “we want more things than are good for us – we need someone to help us face that fact. Perhaps we need to venture courageously into the business world for [God’s kingdom] – we need those who will encourage us in this ministry.... Perhaps our fears keep us from the joyful life of trust – we need those who will prod us into faith.”*

**Fifth, let us discover ways to be with the poor.** Perhaps that involves volunteering somewhere regularly and developing new relationships or undertaking a short-term mission trip. *“One of the most damaging things affluence does is allow us to distance ourselves from the poor...”*

**Sixth, let us experience the meaning of inner renunciation** – recognising when the abundance that has come to us is God’s gift – God’s gift for us to enjoy in good and healthy ways and share with others. Foster writes, *“Perhaps we need to stamp everything in our possession with the reminder, ‘Given by God, owned by God and to be used for the purposes of God.’”*

**Seventh, let us give with glad and generous hearts.** Let us remember our social experiment this morning. Let us share those stories of joyful giving. Let us repeat those stories over and over and over. And let us sing hymns that celebrate salvation coming to our houses and lives lived richly for God!



I mentioned three hymns at the start of this sermon... so I’ve chosen three hymns to finish it – just a verse each from two quirky ones by US minister, Maren Tirabassi, and then Shirley Murray’s *Take my gifts and let me love you*. It is difficult to think about – to preach about money – but these words are my response to God this morning: *Take whatever I can offer-- gifts that I have yet to find, skills that I am slow to sharpen, talents of the hand and mind, things made beautiful for others in the place where I must be: take my gifts and let me love you, God who first of all loved me.*

## **Invitation to Communion**

We are invited to gather around this table as those who belong to the household of Christ, brothers and sisters who in our baptized lives live out the death and resurrection of Jesus. The family of God who inhabit a universe of grace.

*Let's give thanks for this meal.*

Not in a time when the world and all was right, but in a time of great difficulty – and difficult decisions – on the night that Jesus was betrayed...

We come today to proclaim the Lord's supper until he comes.  
To receive food for the journey of faith,  
and to be bound in solidarity with all who walk God's way.

**As Jesus did, so we do – we share this bread together.**

**And as Jesus did, after supper – with the cup – we also share this drink together, and we will hold our cups so we can drink together.**

In these things, this bread and this cup,  
this time of proclaiming Christ's death and life together,  
Christ comes to us with love from God.  
The gifts of God for the people of God.

*Let's pray*

Loving God we have been guests at your table;  
come with us wherever we go  
and be present in all we share.  
Summon out in us, who you have fed,  
generosity of spirit  
to ensure that all the hungry are nourished,  
earth's barren places are fertile  
with food, faith, hope and love. Amen.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Almighty God, we come to you today in confidence, for this world in which we live is your world, brought into being through your love for all your people. And as we bring all our concerns before you, we know that you are waiting to hear us and to respond to us.

Lord, we pray that you will teach us all how to provide for our own lives, mindful of our own needs, yet also of the call of Christ to put our trust in him. Help us to spend our time and our money in a way that is rich towards you – in a manner worthy of your kingdom of love.

Lord, make this church a place of generosity where people work together, where they have the confidence to share their gifts, to express their thoughts and to give generously and faithfully so that the wonderful resources of our world may be better shared.

We pray today those who go through life, constantly seeking a purpose, a reason for living. We remember especially those who store up wealth for themselves believing that the road to happiness is through the accumulation of possessions. Help them to find in you, love, acceptance, and wholeness.

We pray for those – and there are many parts of the world on our hearts this morning – where there is not enough food to go around or there is not enough peace for normal life to continue or there is not enough justice that people can work their land or there is not enough goodness in the soil or regular weather patterns for crops to grow.

Help us, as we have prayed, to show your grace and your generosity, to proclaim your salvation, so that the hungry are fed and the barren places become fertile. We pray this in your name, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

~ written by Rev Anne Paton, and posted on the Church of Scotland's **Starters for Sunday** website.

### **Offering Prayer**

Lord, let our congregation be a witness to you:

immersed in scripture,

constant in prayer,

joyful in worship,

generous in giving.

A loving, supportive community

reaching out to those in need.

Accept these gifts we offer, in Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Benediction**

This is the day that God has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Let us not offer to God offerings that cost us nothing,

But go in peace to love and serve the Lord

in the name of Christ. Amen.