

# The Rich Fool

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A sermon given on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst

Readings: Psalm 49:1-12; Luke 12:13-21

Last week the Euromillions lottery had a winner. I don't know if the winner's name has been released yet, but whoever it was won £170 million. I wonder what you would do with £170 million?

You might think that this is a hypothetical question, and isn't worth thinking about because it isn't going to happen. For most of us, wealth is acquired gradually. If your life is financially secure now, it won't always have been. Thinking back over your life, you will no doubt have faced times when you were struggling to meet all the financial demands of life, when you made do with basic needs and luxuries were a rare treat. Just like putting on weight, getting wealthy is something that usually happens gradually, and we don't notice it. The danger to our spiritual health is that we gradually become accustomed to being more comfortable, being able to afford things we don't need, so that we don't keep an eye on our attitudes to money and possessions. But it's important that we do, because in today's Gospel reading Jesus warns us of the danger of being people "who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God" (Luke 12:21).

The parable of the rich fool is one of many teachings of Jesus about money, and the topic of wealth comes up frequently in the gospel of Luke. Last week's story of the rich man and the poor man was one example. Jesus does not condemn wealth *per se*. Indeed, Jesus' ministry was supported financially by several rich people, including some influential women. But he has strong words about having a wrong attitude towards it.

The context of today's parable is that a man in the crowd has asked Jesus to arbitrate in a dispute with his brother over an inheritance. Jesus refuses to get involved, and comments "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed". Greed takes many forms, and acquisitiveness is one of them. It can be summed up in the phrase "**I want**". Did you notice that the words of the rich farmer were all about himself?

"What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "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."

It was a marked contrast to the attitude which the Jews in the Old Testament were expected to show when they gathered in their harvest. In the book of Deuteronomy<sup>1</sup> the people were told that at harvest time they should bring the firstfruits to the Lord and acknowledge all that he had done for them as a people by bringing them out of slavery in Egypt and giving them a land "flowing with milk and honey". In other words, even though they had put in a lot of hard work in planting, growing and harvesting the crops, the ability to do this was all a gift from God.

Moreover, the appropriate response to God's generosity was to give back to him, both by supporting the ministry of the priests and the system of worship, and by providing for the poor. Every third year the tithe went into a foodbank that provided for the poor, the fatherless and the foreigner who had no land to provide food for himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 26:1-13

Although our lifestyle and the way our society is structured is very different from how it was then, there are some important principles here for us as Christians.

Whereas the Jews celebrated being set free from slavery, we celebrate every week the amazing sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us on the Cross, to set us free from sin and guilt and to make us friends with God. Surely this should influence our attitude to everything. So, while Harvest isn't strictly speaking a Christian festival, it is a welcome opportunity to recognise that whatever prosperity we enjoy is from God. We may have worked for it, but it was God who gave us the opportunity. If we have done well in life, as a result of a stable family to grow up in, or people who encouraged us on the way, if we have had the benefits of education, employment and health, we have much to be grateful for. **Gratitude** is one of the hallmarks of the Christian.

But gratitude is more than words. Like the people of Israel, our response should be to do something practical, and especially to use part of our riches to bless the work of God and to support those in need. Harvest is a time to re-assess our giving to God, both through the Church and in other ways. What we give depends on what we have received. Unlike the Israelites, we are not given a fixed amount, but we are called to be generous. Last week Sarah Ashton gave examples of people in recent times who have generously used their wealth to bless others. That is what the rich farmer did not do. All he could think of was how he could benefit himself from his growing earnings. That was why Jesus said that he was "not rich toward God".

What's the takeaway from today's teaching? We can sum it up in three words beginning with G: Beware of Greed. Be Grateful, and be Generous. What will that mean for you this week?