

Harvest Sermon

by Rev John Castle

A sermon given on Sunday 8th October 2023 at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst (Harvest Thanksgiving)

Readings: Luke 12:13-21

Introduction

Suppose you suddenly inherited £1 million: what would you do with it? How much of it would you spend on yourself – maybe a round-the-world cruise? – or save for the future, and what would you give away? Who would you give it to?

Harvest

Today we are celebrating Harvest, and giving thanks to God for all the blessings we have received. In our gospel reading, we heard Jesus tell a story about a rich farmer who had very successful harvests. It's a story which Jesus told when a man asked him to tell his brother to share some money with him.

At the end of the story, God tells the farmer that he is a fool. Why do you think he said that? And what message did Jesus want his hearers to hear from the story?

Part of the answer seems to be given in the words Jesus uses to introduce the story:

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”¹

Jesus is saying that we need to have the right attitude towards money and possessions. The farmer was greedy and

¹ Luke 12:15 NRSV

selfish – he only thought about how his wealth could make him happy, not about how he could use it to serve God and other people.

I'd like to show you a short video from Tearfund, which shows a very different attitude to money and the gifts that God has given us.

*Show "A visit to Burundi"*².

What struck you about the attitude of the people in the film?

They needed a health centre, and as a result of the Bible study and the training from Tearfund,

“they realised that everything God had already given them could then be used to help the whole community.”

Later in the film it said that: “They realised that when they come together as a community, as a church, they could pool their resources”.

Jesus' story about the rich farmer challenges us about our attitude to money and possessions. It's all too easy to just think about looking after ourselves and our families. But what if God wants us to think of our wider community and our world? Do you see giving to the church and to charity as an optional extra, something you do when you feel like it, if you've got some cash to spare? Or do you see it as an essential part of your regular expenditure, as important as paying the electricity bill or the car insurance?

² Currently available at <https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/no-going-back>

Last Sunday Rev Jane Kraft preached about the Creation, and ended with these words:

“Today we give thanks to God who created this world in which we live. But it should not stop there. If we truly value what God has given us, then we should take care of it and share it equally with all his people.”

As I was thinking about this sermon, I remembered that I had recently received £7,000 from the estate of my mother, who died in July. George and I have a practice of tithing our income – giving away 10%. So I went to the Tearfund website to make a donation of £700. That’s how I discovered this video about the village in Burundi.

I found the video challenging but also inspiring. I hope that many of you will also go to the Tearfund website, or another charity that you support, and make a generous donation this Harvest, as a way of saying thank you to God for all his blessings. But I hope that you will also consider the work of this church, which you are members of.

Here we are in Sandhurst with a dilemma about how we should finance the repairs to our church building and our mission work among families and young people. We have a pot of money from the sale of the St Mary’s land, but it is a finite resource. Whatever we spend on the building can’t be spent on work with families and young people. So is the St Mary’s fund the only resource we have to pay for the spire and work with families and young people?

Perhaps we could learn something from the village in Burundi? When they thought of themselves as a

community, rather than just as individuals or families, they all chipped in, sharing what they had – money, skills, time and labour – so that their health centre could be built. And in the process their faith grew and spread, with more people becoming Christians.

I know that there are people in this church who already give of their time, talents and money. But I am sure that there are so many more resources in this church than are currently being offered in the service of God. We will be looking for grants from outside the church to help us finance our repairs and our mission work. But I believe that the majority of what we need is already here – it just hasn't yet been offered.

So I leave you with this question: which do we resemble more, the greedy farmer in Jesus' parable, or the church in Burundi?

Let us pray.

Lord, you know what amazing resources you have gifted us with, both as individuals and as a church. Please help us to truly appreciate all your goodness to us, and help us to move beyond a token display of generosity to a wholehearted desire to put first your kingdom and to take seriously our responsibility to be good stewards of all that you have entrusted to us. Help us to have the mind of Jesus, who said that there is more blessing in giving than in receiving. We ask this in his name. Amen.