

Sermon – Lk 12v13-21, Ecc..., Ps 49, Col 1v1-11

Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me!

A few weeks ago, there was an article in the paper about two women – stepsisters – who were taking each other to court because each felt that they should get the entire inheritance after their parents had died. They weren't arguing about dividing it, but each was saying that the other should get none, and that she should get all.

We might shake our heads, but when my grandmother died, my sister (who is much younger than I am) had just moved into her first house so - rightly- was allowed to take any furniture that she needed from my grandmother's house. I confess to feeling a small stab of jealousy when she took the writing bureau that I had loved since childhood.

Wanting more is common to all of us. We may want more possessions, or more experiences, or to see more places. But we want more...

Walking into bookstores is dangerous for me. I always like more books, others might prefer more electronic gadgets, or more expensive possessions, but we want more...

The teacher in Ecclesiastes was also King. If anyone had a lot, it was him. If the author was Solomon, he had more land than anyone else in Israel, he had more money, he had more wives – and he was depressed (although having too many wives may have contributed to it).

He had got his priorities wrong...

The key message through the OT reading, the psalm, the gospel is that LIFE, and fulness of life, is more important than having more. Many years ago, Moses stood before the Israelites and said, 'I set before you the road to death or the road to life: Choose life!'

So when Jesus was asked about the inheritance, his response was quick. "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." And he told this parable about a rich man.

We don't know if the man worked in the fields himself or whether he owned the company, but he worked hard and did well. He built barns and then bigger barns for his crops. Nowadays, we might open a bank account, or buy a house-to-let. Notice that God did not say that he was wrong to work hard. He worked and gained reward for it. He was lucky, we know from experience and the Bible that working hard is not always rewarded. Rich people have often been lucky as well

as working hard. Notice as well that God does not say that the man should not eat, drink and be merry!

But God called him a fool. The man had only thought about his outward ease. He had stored up treasures for himself, but had not thought about his soul, or his God or the wider world. In the Bible, a fool is someone who thinks that priorities do not matter, that we can do whatever we want and not think about the wider implications. Anyone who says 'Climate change won't affect me' is a fool....

The man was a fool because he stored up treasures for himself, but was not rich towards God.

The Bible gives us guidelines about what to do with our money. We are responsible for paying our bills, buying food, and caring for our family members. Most of our money will probably be used for those things. If we feel that we lack money, then think about time. We all have 24 hours of time in a day, most of which will be used for paying bills, getting food and caring for family members. But whether money or time, the Bible also says:

1. Give some to God – in gratitude. It's hard to hand money over to God, but giving to the church or Christian charities is an acceptable substitute. God does not need us to give, but he invites us to share in his work, and we need to give. It focuses our life properly and helps us to love God first, with all our heart and mind and soul and strength.
2. Give some to others – to help those who are less well off. If being wealthy depends on luck as well as hard work, then it is hard to say 'This is all mine. My hard work has earned it' as the rich man did.
3. Third, use some to build friendships. The Bible tells us to celebrate with family and friends. And do it NOW – not putting it off to a future date. Eat, drink and be merry! Next time we have a parish lunch, that is a good use of money...

These make our soul rich towards God and bring life.

We are facing a different situation as a church: next door we have a big barn and we are spending lots of money on it. How does this apply?

First: Does it glorify God? Does it turn our focus towards God and remind us of his goodness? Is it a way of giving thanks to God for his goodness? I hope so!

Second: Will it be used for others? Will it be a place of protection and help? Will people be able to hear of God's love and kindness? It will certainly be

better equipped and warmer. At the last fellowship evening, we had an open discussion about what we, as a church, should be stopping and what we should consider starting. [Results on wall] One person said to stop moaning! Many of the ideas about what we could do are about serving the community. We are not owners of that building next door, we are stewards of God's house.

Third: Can we use the building to celebrate and build relationships? Yes – one reason that church buildings exist is to provide nice places for baptisms, wedding and funerals, as well as the times after services where we eat or drink together.

Treasure is not wrong. It can be a blessing. Let us pray that we will use our treasures wisely so our souls are rich towards God.