

St James' Church, Weybridge

Trinity 7 (Proper 13) – 3 August 2025

Introduction and Call to Worship

Today we hear the challenging teaching of Jesus on wealth and possessions. As we come to worship God, let us offer our whole selves to the love that will purify us and teach us where true riches are to be found.

Today's Readings

First Reading Colossians 3:1-11

We are called to put away all forms of behaviour at odds with our new life in Christ.

Gospel Luke 12:13-21

Jesus warns us not to let greed draw us away from true fullness of life.

HOMILY *"Jesus said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.'"* (Luke 12:15)

We are entering a period of Sunday readings according to Luke's Gospel with a significant amount of challenge! Today Jesus teaches the parable of the rich fool; one who is rich in terms of worldly possessions, but foolish in living only for this world, for life is short. Life is a gift and our possessions are just a temporary loan – we can't take them with us. A Christian perspective on life is about what we share, not what we can acquire.

Context in this passage is important, for by looking back a few verses, we can see that today's Gospel parable is our Lord's response to someone appealing to him to intervene in a dispute. A man has a grievance against his brother, who he says

hasn't shared out their inheritance, probably the family land. We have no reason to doubt the legitimacy of the complaint, which may well arise from an acute sense of frustration in the face of perceived or even actual injustice. This man may feel as if his life is on hold until he can get what should be his and as a consequence we may well assume that Jesus will take up his cause?

Whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation, our Lord discerns a deeper need than sorting out the alleged injustice. Jesus sees that even if he were to intervene and resolve this dispute, the man would still face a much more basic challenge. So Jesus turns the conversation around. The man's request identifies a problem in his brother for Jesus to solve, but Jesus responds by warning the man of a problem within himself needing his urgent attention. He is prey to the power of greed or covetousness, and it is this that he must deal with first.

The essence of the challenge is simple. We are led to think that possessing more and more will give us an increasingly full experience of life – this feeling

is just as strong today as it was in 1st Century Palestine! This is the attitude displayed by the man in the parable, driving his compulsive desire to accumulate wealth. But this (as God puts it bluntly at the end of the parable) is false, worldly and misguided! It is a clear misunderstanding of the value of life itself – after all you can't take your wealth with you! It is not our possessions that demonstrate our worth, but rather our ability to love and be loved and share God's gifts with others.

My friends, misunderstanding the priorities of God's Kingdom has tragic consequences. The rich fool's greed isolates him in a world where he is aware just of himself and his need. We can fall foul of this if we try and build up great reserves for a rainy day and put the I before the greater good of God's Kingdom. The values of Jesus are much wider than just the individual, they are actually all about meeting the needs of the wider family or community. Indeed, it could even hinder our church giving and commitment to good stewardship here at St James'. I wonder how high our financial support of the church figures in our

decision making? We will think more about this on Sunday 7th September as part of our stewardship Sunday – I hope you can stay for lunch that day.

The biblical vision of well-being is inherently communal; things are shared. In order that we may have a happy life we need other people, we need to share, to look after and be looked after. But the man in the parable is blinded by his own desire for money and the consequence is that he could miss out on the most important thing of all, the love, support and care of others. This is tragic both for himself – he has lost the “soul” he thinks he is looking after – but also for others, those who (like Lazarus in another parable recorded just by Luke) long for a share in the good things with which the rich man is blessed.

Shortly after this passage Jesus teaches his disciples the positive ideal that contrasts with the rich man’s attitude. Just as they receive abundantly from God, so they must give generously. This is how to acquire “*purses... that do not wear out*” (12:33), the true wealth of those who are “*rich towards God*” (v. 21).

Luke's Gospel account may leave us wondering about the man who asked Jesus to sort out his dispute with his brother and what he made of our Lord's response. Like many others who put questions or requests to Jesus, he receives a reply that opens up quite different issues from those he thought were important. May we reflect upon this parable and ask ourselves whether we also tend to identify problems in other people and become so preoccupied with our own situation or grievances that dangerous attitudes grow within us and come to need urgent attention. Imagine, then, that you have the opportunity to buttonhole Jesus and complain to him. How do you think he might respond?

This passage is for our hearing, just as much as the first Christian followers of Jesus day. This specific warning Jesus issues about covetousness concerns each of us. Whatever our financial resources might be, we need constantly to be reminded of how the compulsive power of greed can eat away at our capacity to live the life to which Jesus calls us. We are reminded by St Paul in his letter to the

Colossians to put away all forms of behaviour at odds with our new life in Christ and that is not always easy. May we be rich towards God as we love unconditionally and share with thankfulness for the bounty we enjoy. Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, August 2025