

Bennochty church 30th October 2016

I don't know what impression you get of Jesus and his priorities, but for me, he has some tough things to say about wealth. The man who builds bigger barns could be anyone today, who has the accumulation of wealth as the most important thing in life.

I want to digress slightly. I was listening to the radio about the future of Wane Rooney at Manchester United. Seemingly Jose Mourinho, manger there, has said if he wants 1st team football, he will need to leave and go to another club. I am not going to say anything about his football ability, but one of the reasons why he might find it difficult to move to another club is his salary. Reputed to be about £250,000 / week basic. Few clubs would be able or willing to pay that amount.

You could build a lot of big barns with £250,000 / week. I don't know how he spends his money, and it's not the point. But in that kind of environment, it is easy to get sucked in to thinking that money is the most important thing in life.

Think about the banks, edifice's build on money making and risking taking, with other people's money, that came crashing down in 2008. They built for themselves bigger barns, only for the structure to fall apart.

The man in this parable has a lot of money. He is probably an absentee landlord. Part of an elite leisured class, who did not need to labour in their own fields. Estimated at less than 1% of

the population. He had everything that life could offer. His motto might have been, "eat, drink and be merry".

Money in itself is not the problem. Many rich people have used their wealth to help others. They maybe did not take the instruction to the rich young ruler to give away all his money, but they have supported many good causes around the world. The best example is Bill Gates and his wife through their charitable foundation. If you look at their web site, it is headed, *all lives have equal value, we are impatient optimists working to reduce inequality*. A good aim and a good use of money. Compare that to the man in this parable. He hoarded his wealth for no good reason, other than affirming himself and his status in the world.

Wealth is relative. We are not Bill gates. Rich or poor, wealth is what we have. If we hold onto it, it doesn't actually matter how big our barns are, and at the end of the day, this man found out, as we all know, there are 'no pockets in a shroud'! You can't take it with you. Mind you, ancient civilisations, like the Egyptians and the Celts thought you could. Their large barns of wealth, accumulated in this world, taken into the afterlife. How different the words of Jesus, to what is important in life.

What is our response to this man? Are we quick to say, what a fool! But let's be honest, we all build our barns, if not for ourselves, but in what we leave for others.

Jesus condemns this man, not for his wealth, but his failure to recognise what is actually important in life. In today's world, no one is saying you can survive without money, that is just not realistic, but this man believed his riches would enable him to sit back and enjoy life. What Jesus is saying, compared with what is valuable in the eyes of God, worldly wealth is not important. Wealth is about being rich in faith. I think we know that, but it is still a struggle to live out the words of Jesus.

One of my favourite passage of scripture is the next section of Luke's gospel. I actually like the Matthew version better. If the rich fool got it wrong, here's the response of Jesus as to how we should live a life of faith. Maybe these are words specifically spoken to those who had little material wealth. Don't worry about your food and clothing. Don't be anxious about the basics of life. Possessions beyond one's needs are worthless. There's a challenge to us.

Jesus says, look at the example of God's creation that doesn't need to store wealth for tomorrow. Lilies were scarlet anemones that bloomed for one day after infrequent rain showers in the summer and then died, and as wood was scarce, such wild flowers were used to feed oven fires. He also uses the example of Solomon. The king who reigned during the

wealthiest period in the history of Israel. If fine clothes are sign of wealth, they are nothing in comparison to the beauty of nature itself.

I don't believe for a moment that Jesus is asking us to give away everything we have, but if he did, what would our response be? The answer to that question challenges our attitude to what we understand as our priorities in life and, it engages, not just the mind, but the heart, in our response to God. If we did not know, from one day to the next, where our food or clothing was coming from, I suspect we would read this passage very differently. To some who were listening, was that their reality? Probably. For many in the world today, it is certainly their daily experience.

Faith in God is about living in the here and now. To many of us that is an ideal we do not live up to. We plan our financial futures to make sure we have enough to live on. I am not for a moment suggesting we don't do that. It is the right and sensible thing to do. But, if we believe God knows our needs. Do we really trust him for that provision?

This is story about building God's wealth. What lasts for an eternity. It is about building the Kingdom of God here on earth, today, and not barns of wealth, for tomorrow.

It was Willie Barclay who said, "*processions beyond one's need are worthless.*" Amen.

