

Base your investment policy ...

... on generosity

A sermon given on the Seventh Sunday of Trinity, 31st July 2022 – by the Vicar the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster

Luke 12:13-21

Well I don't know whether you've got a date with the television set this afternoon, to be cheering on the Lionesses in the European Women's Championship final against Germany. But whichever side it wins, I'm sure it'll be the teamwork that does it. For years, these players have been training not only to develop their individual skills, but to work together as a team. And when you're competing at the highest level, that's the aspect that matters most. No matter how talented players may be individually, if they can't instinctively work as a team and think about one another, they will lose out to rivals who can do that better.

What has this got to do with today's gospel about rich men building barns? Well, I think it's because the gospel raises the question of what it is that you or I might be investing in. Are you investing in developing your own skills, your own career, your own life? Or are you investing in the team, in your relationships, in your community, in your church? The most distinctive thing about the man in the parable is not actually that he is rich, it's that he is isolated. Notice how not only is there no other character in this parable, there is no other person even in this man's head - his imagination leaves no room for anyone other than himself. Listen to all the pronouns: he thought to 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 then I will store all my grain and my goods. He doesn't even talk to anyone else, but only to himself: I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.'

But he hasn't got anyone to eat, drink, or be merry with. The only future that beckons looks like being filled with lonely alcoholism. He's running a big farm, so he won't be running it singlehanded, yet there's no mention of his family or household or workforce. This man must be surrounded by other people, but he's not investing in his relationships with any of them, and least of all with his relationship with God. And at the end, of course, death catches up with him and he discovers too late that guess

what? You can't take it with you. When you make investment decisions, you're supposed to take account of the level of risk there is to your investment and the biggest risk of all is so obvious, it's not really a risk at all: it's a certainty that one day we shall die.

So how are we investing in readiness for that? A few verses later on, Jesus offers a rather different investment policy: sell your possessions and give alms; make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

I don't think Jesus is saying you shouldn't ever save money or that you shouldn't have a pension plan. The question is, what are you investing for? What is the benefit you are hoping to reap? The rich man in the parable was already rich at the beginning. He wasn't a poor man needing to scrape some pennies together for his old age. He was rich to start off with, so he didn't need to gather in more and more just for himself.

The investment Jesus is commending is that of generosity. When, for example, you buy an ice cream for a friend, you're investing in that relationship. You're saying I value our friendship, I love you. You could have kept the money for something else for yourself, but instead you choose to spend it now in order to strengthen something lifegiving, your friendship.

The church commissioners have had this discussion. One of the achievements of Justin Welby as Archbishop has been to get the church commissioners to recognise that it isn't really good stewardship if in a few years time they've got £50 billion in the bank, but the churches are all empty. There is a recognition that this is the rainy day for which they were saving. So they're spending their money, supporting all kinds of mission projects around the dioceses, in recognition of the fact that if they don't invest in mission now, they don't invest in people, there won't be a church to do mission at all- generosity is less of a risk than storing it in barns under lock and key.

And so it is for you and me. When we give to the church, we're not paying to cover the costs of the institution, even less paying as customers for services we expect to receive. Rather, we are investing in our community, in our relationships with the rest of the body of Christ, in our shared sense of calling and vocation to share the love of God. So let me encourage you this morning, even in these financially tough times,

when money is tight and everything is expensive, make sure you choose the right investment policy. Yes, you have to eat and stay warm, but try to invest with an eye on the really long term, on eternity. Base your investment policy on generosity, on serving others, on your relationships, and not just on making your own independent arrangements, like the rich man in the parable.

Put your resources into your relationships and into helping those in need, into building up the church. And those relationships will be the best guarantee for your future, because we worship a God who is the opposite of the rich man, who though he is the creator and in a sense, owner of everything, chooses not to keep it to himself, but pours it out holding nothing back, who offers up even his own son, so that his relationship with the world might be healed and restored, so that out of giving might come love; out of generosity might come grace; out of self-offering might come the biggest return of all - the grateful hearts of those who have been set free.

Reading Text

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'* ¹⁴ *But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?'* ¹⁵ *And he 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.'* ¹⁶ *Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly.'* ¹⁷ *And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?"* ¹⁸ *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."* ¹⁹ *And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."* ²⁰ *But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"* ²¹ *So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'*