

Living Generously

Luke 12.13-21

This sermon was preached on Sunday 31st July 2022 by Lou Bayliss, the Diocesan Giving Facilitator, as part of our stewardship campaign.

It is wonderful to join you for worship this morning. A bit about me- I became Giving Facilitator with CofE Birmingham in March last year having come from parish ministry in a lay capacity. My role is to come alongside parishes and turn what can often be the elephant in the room, giving, into a conversation about generosity in all its forms, discipleship, ministry and mission.

Personally addressed letters and packs have been prepared for you to collect at the end of the service and there are some blank envelopes if there isn't one with your name on. These have been put together to help communicate the importance of giving and its impact on this church and community. Also, and importantly, to say thank you. You'll also read about the financial position of this parish- how it is generally breaking even, but what further mission might look like if giving could be increased. This is an opportunity to reconnect with the importance of generous giving in our own faith and discipleship. Possibly to think a little about how individually and together we're able to build on our generosity, becoming even more powerful agents of transformation in the community and world we seek to serve in the name of Jesus. So, this reading, another of Jesus' famous parables, couldn't be more apt. Isn't it funny how the lectionary seems to land?

A little context, the person in the crowd asking for Jesus to intervene on a matter of inheritance, wouldn't have been out of place at the time. The possession of land was a vital Jewish symbol with families clinging to inheritance for both religious and economic status. So Jesus' words would have been very challenging, just as they are today. But what does the parable mean? I certainly don't claim to have the answers, but for what it's worth, this is how the passage spoke to me.

After reading it a few times and even starting to write what was becoming a deep theological reflection, someone was placed on my heart- my late Grandad, Harry. So, I'd like to tell you about him, and pray that I've got it right, that this is what we're meant to hear today.

He was the very opposite of the rich fool. The rich man lived for himself. He only talks of himself- I, I'll, me. There is no sense of gratitude towards God or the workers who have helped with his crop. No thoughts of sharing. But Grandad would have given you the shirt

off his back. He was quite a character, one of 16 children from West Brom and came from a long line of miners. He and my Nan didn't have a lot, but he was one of the most generous men I've ever known. My most abiding memory is this...my Grandad loved Christmas, and I mean really loved it. He'd be choosing gifts months in advance and sending my long suffering Nan, who was also a kind, gentle soul, out with a list long before the day. He'd be baking cakes, often for the Baptist church which had provided such important fellowship for my Nan over the years. He got joy from seeing our faces on Christmas Day. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't extravagant, but the gifts had been carefully considered. He would sit back in his chair and watch, happy in our happiness, smiling from ear to ear...and for a man who liked to make out he was the archetypal grump, that was something to behold.

They never lived beyond their means and at the risk of oversharing, they left behind what many would consider a very modest sum when they passed. But this I know; at both of their funerals the crematorium was packed, standing room only. For Grandad, in particular, let me put this into context. He had very poor mobility for much of his later years and so didn't get to socialise. At 81, he was one of the last of his many siblings, and remember that gruff exterior? However, it was full of the nurses from Moseley Hall Hospital, whom he had secretly snuck the chocolate and biscuits to he'd asked Mum to bring everyday for the months and months he was an inpatient. The congregation from my Nan's church, who had died two years earlier, and countless other people and neighbours whose lives he had touched through his unwavering but quiet generosity. So why am I telling you this? What was the point of the Christmas anecdote? Well in a world where we are constantly reminded what we don't have, where the pressures of life and society can make us wonder where the next crisis might come from, I think my Grandad got it. He understood that our lives aren't secured by possessions, but by something far greater. If I'm honest I don't know if my Grandad was a man of faith, I do know he supported my Nan in hers and so would undoubtedly have heard her pray and read her bible. He lived his life through the joy of others, that was his treasure. Happiness came from loving his neighbour, fellowship (by proxy via cake), and mutual thriving- does that sound familiar? It's certainly not what we heard about the rich fool with his barn fit to bursting.

We are God's treasure and His gifts are beyond measure. Life, love, grace and resurrection. We will shortly be receiving one of the most incredible gifts of all, a time to be in communion with each other and with Him. As we work through scripture, as we experience life, we will constantly uncover more and more hidden gifts from our creator God, but just as we are called to share our earthly treasures and gifts, we are most definitely called to share the spiritual gifts of God's love and grace.

So how do we do that? This leaflet talks about your church's vision, for having further engagement with local schools, a children and families worker, follow up baptism and funeral ministry, supporting charities and causes across the world. Imagine each of these

things wrapped up, perhaps like a Christmas present, with a little bow on top if you like, because that's what they are- gifts. However, in reality they don't come from fresh air. Could you consider how your generosity, how particularly your financial gifts, could help to make them a reality? We are blessed by God, we are blessed to be a blessing to others and blessed to be building the Kingdom, that's a whole lot of blessings right there.

A quick pause. Exploring the word and reflecting on what it means for our lives is part of our journey of discipleship. When it comes to giving and money, which occurs a lot in scripture, it can be challenging and sensitive. Our exploration is NOT a scriptural stick to beat ourselves or others with. It is NOT a guilt trip. Instead it is an opportunity to talk to each other and to God, asking for his wisdom and discerning how we can live generously, what we can give and how we might discover the joy of giving, in all its forms - time, talent and financially. Giving to the church isn't a membership fee but it also shouldn't be seen as an optional extra. Instead it's a response to God, a God of abundance.

Remember those three words we heard Jesus say at the end of the passage- "rich towards God". What does that look like for you, for us, today? How might your gift, your generosity, transform **breaking even**, into **breaking out**, the breaking out of God's Kingdom into this community and beyond? Perhaps rediscovering, like Grandad, the joy of giving, its life giving properties and how that becomes our treasure, in this life, the here and now.

If you want to find out more.....

We have produced a leaflet about Giving Generously in Shirley Parish. You can read it by clicking [here](#). You can also read the accompanying letter from Rev Paul by clicking [here](#).

If you would like to make a response, the form can be downloaded [here](#).

Financial offerings may be made directly via our website [here](#).

Thank you very much.