

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 20th October 2024 – Money series sermon (2)

Text: Luke 12:22-24

It was cold in the playground. We lined up against the back fence, a mixture of ages, backgrounds, men and women. This was part of the Bridgebuilders course on engaging with conflict, an exercise that explored equality. We were invited to take one, two or three steps forward in response to questions – about family background, age, gender, opportunities for education, etc

Although we were asked not to look back until the end, with each question I found myself as a white, middle-class university educated male born in the 1960s gradually pulling further and further ahead

Finally, I could look around, from what turned out to be the front: and I was shocked with what I saw in terms of where we each were on that playground

During October we are exploring what money is and the part it plays in our lives and in God's purposes. The All Saints 2024 Stewardship programme is called "An Invitation to gratitude & generosity".

This week I want to talk about money as income – whether as wages, pension, social benefits – and what we understand that to be and what we believe is needed for a person to flourish

We will draw on the two Bible passages. The first is the account of origins, Genesis and the other Jesus' teaching in Luke 12 about God's Kingdom and the place of income and what it provides – food, clothes, shelter etc

Genesis talks of meaningful work, of human beings called to steward the earth, be co-creators with God, this being part of God's "good" purposes

Luke talks of God's Kingdom, how His purposes of goodness and justice play out in economic terms and our response to that – either anxiety and striving or trust and freedom

Interestingly neither talks about money

Written in nomadic or agrarian societies while money would have existed, ordinary people would have mostly grown their own food or bartered for what they needed.

For sure there is mention made of money in the gospels – payment to those who must labour and pay taxes but not in the highly developed way we understand financial systems today where money moves as figures around the world on super computers.

Indeed it would have been about the intrinsic value of the coin used rather than any theoretical value

Which I guess would have probably put people in the time of Jesus, and indeed many parts of the world today, more in touch with the "sacramental" nature of money than we are here in Western Europe where since Covid many of us rarely even touch cash

By "sacramental" I mean what money represents – not just to us who use it, but also to God and how He has created His world and His just and loving desires for all who live in it

On the one hand money represents our income - our effort, labour and gifts

On the other hand money represents what we believe is needed for daily life in what we spend and what we spend it on

Income and how it is achieved tells the story of the work we do and who we believe we are
As we earn, we are making value laden expressions of ourselves – our innate gifts, our identity
And as we spend we are also expressing what is important to us in very concrete ways
And both in turn – our earning and our spending - place us in complex networks of relationship with others – their earning and their access to what they need for a fulfilled life
Sadly those are often unequal and unjust networks

As disciples of Jesus all of this earning and spending is something He cares passionately about
The heart of the issue is the word “strive” in v29 of Luke 12

It is a word about that which is of greatest importance to me, echoes of the Greatest Commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength

“Strive” is a word that invites the question: what do you give your best to in life?

And for most adults, directly or indirectly, that is linked to wages and income and the way we earn it
Do we worry, do we anxiously strive?

Or are we rooted in an awareness that God knows of those needs, they will be given, and so we are set free to strive, bring our non-anxious best to something bigger, participating in God’s Kingdom

What does that striving look like?

It’s rooted in the nature of what we believe we need for life and how we get it

In v 22 Jesus talks about “worrying about your life” – and then describes living life in one way: with a focus on what we will eat, drink, health, what we will wear

He doesn’t say those things are wrong

Instead He goes on to say that life is about more than them (v23)

In the same way Jesus is not critical of work towards obtaining those things

Instead He urges His disciples to go about that without worry or striving

That worry isn’t just about mental health

Its about a fundamental mindset: of scarcity or abundance

Scarcity is a mindset that plays out in many different ways ...

For example: where we find our ultimate worth – which raises the question of level of wages we aspire to and why, and the issue of justice around that – everything from the legitimacy of a society permitting the gig economy through to differentials in wages in a company and between the boardroom and shop floor, and between male and females doing the same job

Scarcity plays out as two peoples struggle in a zero-sum game over one piece of land which is for them both deeply sacred

Isn’t verse 30 interesting in the light of all that is tragically unfolding between Israel and Palestine, and in different ways between Russia and Ukraine

For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them

All of this is about a belief that life is rooted in scarcity (v31)

Instead, says Jesus, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Jesus urges His disciples – you and me - to seek first, to strive for, to bring our best to something rooted in abundance: what He calls God the Father's kingdom, life rooted in abundance, God's unlimited and unconditional love

And as we do so we find ourselves not only free, but also provide for

This is not a verse about everyone becoming Vicars!

It's about everyone in the midst of the place, the vocation, the job God has called you to – paid worker or unpaid homemaker, employee or employer – each of us living and working out of the place of abundance, freedom, trust in our good benevolent King

In v32-34 Jesus makes the point radically:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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

It's to be set free from being possessed by your possessions in the here and now

The image is of the money bags people carried – if they accidentally tore or wore out the money would drop out

Instead the image is about deliberately plunging your hand so deeply into a trust in God's abundance that we push through the bottom of our own scarce provision and out and through into His abundant provision

For, as Jesus ends His teaching: where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (v34)

What do you strive for? What do you bring your best to in the rhythms and priorities of your week?

What and where is your treasure, what do you deep down depend most on?

And have you ever asked Jesus what He thinks of that?

In the stewardship scheme packs we have prepared we invite you and your household to a spiritual exercise about just this – it's not about getting you to give more to our church

It's about asking Jesus this question: and waiting for His answer

Which is always about Him inviting us to step deeper into His freedom and abundance