

St Botolph's Church Worthing
31 July 2016
Luke 12:13-21
Reverend Roger Walker

Last Sunday we heard from Jesus' teaching about prayer. Today he is teaching about money: quite a contrast, but just as relevant to our lives as Christians, especially as we have been born into a wealthy part of the world and we know that even those of us who consider ourselves poor would be considered rich beyond compare by many who live in this world. So what are we being taught about money and does it have any link to our lives of prayer? We can so easily divide our lives into two compartments: spiritual and physical, and move between the two without them actually overlapping. This was certainly the case with the man who provided today's parable by asking Jesus to tell his brother to divide an inheritance with him.

Who knows why this seemingly unfair situation had come about, but Jesus does not address this. Rather, he goes to the root of the man's problem – greed – firmly rooted in the physical compartment of his life with no trace of thankfulness for his brother's good fortune. Thankfulness would be part of the spiritual compartment, and Jesus shows how spiritual and physical elements cannot be separated. He says 'a man's life – spiritual – does not consist in the abundance of his possessions – physical – and then he goes on to tell his parable to illustrate this. We can thus see how the rich man in the parable ignores the spiritual: he does not give thanks to God for his good harvest, nor does he consider blessing anyone else with it.

His plan is to pull down his barns and build bigger ones to hold his harvest and then live a life of idleness – eat, drink and be merry. You don't get much more physical than this. But – oh dear – the spiritual intervenes in a big way. This night, says God, your soul will be required of you, You are going to die and enter the spiritual realm. Who, then, will get what you have prepared for yourself? Or, to put it more bluntly – your goods and riches will not do you any good there. So, Jesus concludes, this is what it will be like for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.

What we have to ask ourselves this morning is 'how can I be rich towards God? How can I blend the physical and spiritual aspects of my life – making sure the spiritual has more influence? Well, if we go back to last Sunday and our thoughts about the Lord's Prayer in particular, we can see that having a relationship with Our Father is central to our lives.

Prayer, for a Christian, is in effect communication within the family and if we pray faithfully two things will happen. First, God provides for us. If you think about it: clever though we are in using it, everything we have and eat and drink comes from God's creation. His creation is the ultimate example of spiritual and physical being part of one whole. Secondly, God is looking for his family on earth – his Church – to show this blend of spiritual and physical. We pray specifically that God will forgive us – as we forgive others. This is a spiritual action that must be part of all our lives if we are to live within God's

Kingdom. His Kingdom – his rule over us – asks us to care for each other and to care for his world. This is what being rich towards God means: relating to him as our Father and to Jesus as our brother through prayer, through his words, through his sacraments and showing to all on this earth the love that he shows to us.

Both of the brothers who triggered this parable failed in this – the one with the inheritance did not show care for his brother, and the complaining one did not accept his brother's good fortune. He just wanted money, which is a real enemy of a truly united spiritual physical life: a life rich towards God. St Paul got it quite right when he wrote to Timothy 'the love of money is the root of all evil'. So in practical terms, what is this parable asking of us? First that we keep close to God in prayer and in Bible reading: next, that we keep close to our brothers and sisters in Christ, allowing God to rule our hearts in all our relationships with them. Third, being willing to share what we have with them and with others in ways that will honour God the Creator, from whom it all comes.

I want to leave you with two well-known scriptural quotations to reflect upon. From the Old Testament, words of King David in Chronicles 29 'all things come from you and of your own do we give you'. From the New Testament, words of St Paul to Timothy – 1 Timothy 6 – linked to the ones we have just heard 'We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out of it'. These and so many of the Biblical texts show us that our life is one – spiritual and physical indivisible – and that as we would the two together we can indeed be rich towards God. This is a richness that has nothing to do with money.

AMEN

Rev Roger Walker

31.7.16