

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	10 August 2025
Service:	Eucharist, Eight Sunday after Trinity
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

Last week's sermon was based on Luke 12, the Parable of the Rich Fool – the farmer who had an exceptionally good crop and set about working out how to increase his profits by building new barns. All to no avail, as he died that same night. And God's judgement on him, 'You fool!' In his calculations the farmer had taken no thought of God or his neighbour, just himself. This week's Gospel reading comes from the same Chapter and in many ways continues a similar theme. For want of a better title, I've called it 'Investing for the Future'.

We live in an anxious world and many of us, especially young people, fret about the future. The rise in mental health problems is acute. The world seems unstable and changing rapidly; whether it's tectonic shifts in the political landscape; the rise of the extreme right-wing parties or the problems associated with immigration. The economy has stalled and seems difficult to restart, while our screens are full of terrible pictures of suffering. Not to mention climate change, which features high on the scale of what our young people worry about. As individuals we seem powerless. While I suspect that most of us here are cushioned from the worst of the economic problems, it still leaves us feeling uneasy.

Compared to Jesus' audience of course, we are rich beyond imagining. For many of them destitution was only one step away if the family's main breadwinner was sick or died. Similarly, most of them would only have had one spare garment, if that. It was to people with this chronic level of anxiety and economic instability, that Jesus delivered his teaching about wealth and priorities. Unlike a benign, modern 'wellbeing course', Jesus' teaching is altogether more radical.

I admit that I do not find this chapter is easy reading!

The Parable of the Rich Fool ends with God's condemnation of those who 'store up treasures for themselves and are not rich towards God.' In contrast, our passage opens on a much more comforting note, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' All of Jesus' ministry is concerned with introducing God's Kingdom – where new rules about love and power are the norm. But it's not often in the Gospels that Jesus says, 'Do not be afraid,' and the phrase, 'little flock', is affectionate. He realises that what he is about to say we will find difficult. And we do!

³³Sell 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. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

We do need to be clear – Jesus is not saying that we cannot have any property or possessions – he enjoyed staying at the house of Mary and Martha. Women like Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward supported Jesus' ministry from their personal wealth. The New Testament and Jesus himself has a clear expectation that his followers will support their parents when they need it – Jesus condemns the Pharisees who had developed a sophisticated way of evading this responsibility. One of the gifts of the Spirit in the Old Testament was the ability to be able to craft beautiful things for the Temple. God our Father understands the way in which objects carry emotional significance for us. But Jesus demands a radical generosity from those who follow him. The Kingdom of God is concerned with God's values and priorities being brought to bear on our greed and anxieties.

What prevents us from taking heed of course is fear. Our possessions can easily become our security. We're frightened that we won't have enough; we love our possessions and so do not want to let go of them; we accumulate more and more of them. The challenge is to see them in the right perspective. If we are heirs to an eternal kingdom then why are we not willing to get rid of some of them and invest in heaven? We have God as our Father, we are his children, he knows we need things, why do we not trust him?

The other two readings set for today, from Genesis and Hebrews, puzzled me, until I realised that the lectionary writers were seeking to address this very problem of lack of trust in God – lack of faith. They had chosen the story of Abraham who heard what God was saying to him and dared to put it into practice. He left his home, left the comforts of his home town, Ur and set out for the land that God had promised him. He trusted God. It was not an easy

journey, but ultimately the result was both the land and the people God had promised.

'Do not be afraid little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'. This is both a reassurance but also a challenge. God is giving us his kingdom, both now and for all eternity. The question comes how seriously are we investing in our future? 'Mak(ing) purses for (our)selves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.' One day we will face God, either at Christ's Second Coming or on Judgment Day. 'Do not be afraid, little flock' says Jesus, but the challenge is obvious.