

Week 1: The Rich fool

With thanks to Dave Hopwood for his contributions



Prayer

Dear Lord, open our hearts and our minds to the richness of your generosity. Amen

Reading

Luke 12:13-21: Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."



Questions

Watch [generosity](#) from the Bible project.

The problem is our 'mindset'; what do you think? How can your mind be renewed (according to Romans 12)

Can you recall a moment when giving to another person has blessed you in some way?

Space for your thoughts

Reflection

In Luke 12 Jesus told a story about a rich man, who was twice blessed by God. He'd been given loads of money, and he had been given bumper crops. Those listening to the story would have been green with envy. This man was clearly one of God's chosen. And yet Jesus wrong-foots everyone by telling them this man was a fool! He wouldn't share what he had been given. His attitude had overtaken him and separated him from others. We are told he spoke to himself – he didn't go to anyone in his community for guidance and wisdom. Perhaps he had bought so much land that he had no one nearby to go to for advice! His money had built walls between him and others.

In another part of Luke we are told about another rich man. A tax collector Zacchaeus. He's famous for having climbed a tree, but what's more astonishing is that when Jesus blessed him with a new start, Zacchaeus then blessed the whole town with a new start! He gave the people refunds. Luke also highlights the precious and vital generosity of those on the margins. The poor widow in Luke 21 (widows had very little in Jesus' day) who placed her small gift in the temple treasury, gave way more than those those who had so much they would barely notice their donation. Luke also describes the shepherds who came to see the newborn Jesus. They didn't have the gold or incense of the wise men, but they had time and they could give that.

I'm inspired by Antanas Mockus, the Mayor of Bogota who changed his city with the power of encouragement. He handed out thumbs-up cards for citizens to pass on to those they saw being kind. I sometimes hand out encouragement cards when I speak, which say, 'Well done, I really like what you did there.' Since starting to do this I have been so encouraged myself by the stories of those who have handed these cards out to friends and strangers when they have seen them do good and kind things for others. One lady saw a dad patiently caring for his young children as they waited for a bus. She handed him a card to say, 'Well done.'

In Jesus's day generosity was recognised as worship. So if I bought a copy of The Big Issue in the high street the vendor would stop everyone and announce, 'Look – Dave has worshipped God. He's just given glory to our creator.' Giving was not just part of a meeting, but a way of life. When we bless God with our generosity to others, we are often blessed ourselves' If you have ever had a sense of wellbeing after helping someone, I believe that is the presence of God within us saying, 'Well done.'



Prayer

Dear Lord, open our hearts and our minds to the richness of your generosity. Amen

Reading

Luke 12: 22-33: 22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

"Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Read Poem 'The Penguin'

Poem 'The Penguin'

'Don't worry...' we are told. If only.
But Jesus tells us more, offers us something else.
Go and find something green, he suggests.
Something that flies, or sings, or blossoms.
Something that drifts in the breeze.
Something that moves a little slowly.
Consider the robins, the skies, the worms, the daisies.
Birds do of course come a cropper,
And fall from the skies (Jesus tells us this),
And the grass withers and flowers fade...
But in going outside, or looking through glass,
To these things of creation,
To things, bigger, smaller, brighter, quirkier...
We lift our minds for a time,
Take them from our worries,
From the mess and chaos and uncertainty,
And offer them to our creator.
Jesus isn't just saying,
'Don't think of the elephant in the room,'
But rather... 'Ooh look! There's a penguin!'
Offering us something else to fill our thoughts,
Something to help us focus our minds again on him.

Reflection

In this reading, Jesus encourages his followers not to worry about material things, but instead to focus on the kingdom of God. Not easy to do! We live in a world of material things. Christian activist Shane Claiborne says that we are all addicted to money, unable to survive without it. Jesus once said – 'Where your treasure is there your heart will be too.' Here Jesus encourages us to keep refocussing our concerns back on God.

It seems to me that Jesus is not just saying think about the flowers or the birds, but rather go and look at them or something else in nature, as a way of reminding ourselves that everything is under God. We are part of a bigger picture. I sometimes give out jigsaw pieces to folk when I speak in church services, a physical reminder that we are all a unique and vital part of a bigger picture that God is putting together in this world. (Think about how it feels to finish a 1000 piece jigsaw only to find a couple of pieces missing. You and I are those vital pieces.)

Another reason for taking a moment to look at the beauty in creation, is that it reminds us how generous God is, and how precious is his world. Just think how popular David Attenborough's documentaries are. People are mesmerised by the size and wonder and detail in creation. The Psalms are full of invitations to pause in our days and reflect, a way of focussing back on God and calming our minds. 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,' Psalm 24 tells us, surely a reminder of the bigger picture. The writers of the Bible frequently remind us to think on the Creator and his view of things. The famous line from Psalm 46 verse 10 advises us to simply still ourselves from time to time, and know again the presence of God.

Questions

Which material things do you most worry about?
Have you known a time when focussing on God has helped with your worries?
How might looking for a 'penguin' help you to recentre yourself on God's generosity?

