

Marilyn Webb Sermon - Sunday 16 August 2020
The Stories of The Gospel: The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)

I can remember quite some years ago, watching a new building going up and wondering what it would be because it was different to the buildings around it, the other buildings were car showrooms etc. It was quite an industrial style and I imagined it would be a factory or something like that. When eventually the building was finished a sign went up saying self-storage. What was that? Self-storage to me was a wardrobe, my cupboards at home, and when someone explained to me that it was for people who have too much stuff at home and no longer have space for, it I was totally bemused. How can people have that much stuff, that they can't fit it in their homes and why keep stuff you obviously don't really need because you wouldn't be able to get to it easily? There seems to be a whole industry now creating storage solutions so that the stuff we keep takes up less space so that we can get even more stuff.

Now those of you who know me well will understand that I love having a good clear out. In fact, lockdown has meant many of my days not working, have been spent in clearing things out. Who would have thought I still had things to get rid of and I could have the emptiest garden shed ever.

Let us stop and think about this rich young fool and ask ourselves whether we have fallen into the habit of continually getting more stuff just for the sake of having more stuff. Do you get excited about having more stuff? Lockdown was a nightmare for those who like to go shopping until we discovered what we could get online. I was amazed at the queues when lockdown was lifted a little bit and we could go to non-food shops and people were queuing for hours just to go in and do some shopping.

But I wonder if we have ever bought anything just to make ourselves feel better? Maybe because you are feeling sad or lonely, I know I have. Have you ever had that internal dialogue that goes along the lines of:

- Do I really need this? No I don't, but wouldn't it look good in that certain place?
- Do I really need this? No I don't, but I love it so much and it's been tough, don't I deserve it?
- Do I really need this, is this money I really need to spend? No, but won't so and so be impressed?

If you answer yes to some or all of those questions, perhaps you need to ask yourself - is getting more stuff becoming too important to me?

Getting more stuff is not necessarily just about physical things it can also be about getting more attention and approval, about knowledge and academic accolades. It can be about power and control. It can be about wealth and influence. There are so many ways in which we can be trying to get more stuff. Maybe our need for more stuff, which can so easily turn to greed, has a deeper root in our hearts. Is accumulation of more stuff, just a way to try to fill a void in your heart?

- If I have more attention and approval, I will feel accepted and valued.
- If I have more knowledge and academic accolades, people will be impressed.
- If I have more power and control then no one can hurt me.
- If I have more wealth then I will feel secure.

Many of us have the feeling that if we have more, we will be satisfied and life will be better, but this greed leads us to think that more of anything will be a solution to all our problems and I really don't believe it will, because the more we have, the more we need to help fill that void. Like the alcoholic or the drug addict, they start off needing just a little, but their body gets used to it and they need more and more. This is what can happen to us, the more stuff we have the more we need. But the truth is these things never work.

I knew someone who dealt in stocks and shares, if the shares went up it was a good day but if they went down they were really upset. They would scrimp and save so they didn't spend too much money and if they wanted something they convinced themselves that their money would be worth more in the future and they could leave it to their son. But the sad thing was that all the money they had did not bring them happiness, it did not bring them security, it just caused them to worry more and more about keeping it and holding on to it.

The man in this parable thought because he had more stuff he could relax and enjoy life but my experience shows that so often when you have more stuff it doesn't make you happy. It can feel overwhelming and you can feel guilty about having so much stuff and worry about keeping it, especially if it is money.

I am not saying that all possessions are bad and I'm not saying getting rid of our belongings is the solution but we do need to think about this. If we have a tendency to want more stuff we need to ask ourselves what is going on in our hearts? What is it doing to who we are and how we relate to God, and how does God feel about this? Because the opposite to greed and hoarding is generosity. God had blessed the man in this parable with more than he needed. The man's solution was to hoard it and think just about himself, when I am sure that God's solution in this blessing, was that he should bless others and there must have been plenty of people in need around him. Perhaps like us, sometimes he had stopped noticing them and had got into the habit of thinking about himself first.

If we truly believe that every good thing we have comes from God, then surely we must understand that God doesn't give it to us for us to keep, but he wants us to be generous and for us to share. God in his generosity calls us to be a generous people. When God gives to us, he expects us to share it with those around us.

Remember the story of the widow at Zarephath, [1 Kings 17:7-16] who had nothing left except enough flour and oil to make a final meal for herself and her son. But when Elijah asked her to share this with him, in fact to give it to him first, she did, and she found that God just kept replenishing her flour and her oil, so despite the famine she never went without. She trusted and leant on God's generosity and he came through for her. Imagine what would have happened if she had said no to Elijah and kept what she had for herself. It's because of her generosity that thousands of years later, we know and still talk about this story.

But it's not just in material things, God is generous with his time, with his compassion, with his acceptance and with his love and asks us to be the same. There is a real freedom in not having to keep everything to ourselves, a real freedom in sharing the things God has given us, whether it is material things or the gifts he has given us. A spirit of generosity speaks so much louder than words. If we want to impact the community around us, then generosity is the way to go about it. Keeping things for ourselves shows the world around us that we don't really trust God, that we can't rely on him, we can only rely on ourselves. But generosity shows that we have a generous God and that we trust him and we believe that he will be there for us.

The farmer in our Bible passage thought he would have an easier life if he built more barns to store more grain, so that he didn't have to work, so that he could take it easy. What did that say to his neighbours? It just showed his selfishness, it just showed that what he had he wasn't prepared to share. What did it do to his relationship with God? Because God had blessed him so generously but he didn't take that blessing and share it as God expected him to do.

Jesus once said, "*Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,*" [Luke 12:15] and really we know that to be true. What is more important for each of us today? A bigger house, more money, more stuff or knowing that God is pleased with our generosity because what he has given us we have shared with others? How would it feel today knowing that our generosity speaks volumes to those around us, impacts them in ways that sometimes words cannot, and to know that God is pleased with our generosity? Let us pray:

Heavenly Father we want to begin by thanking you for your generosity towards us. Thank you for all that you give us, whether it's financially, whether it's in our gifts, whether in families, relationships, all the things you give us, we want to give you thanks for them. And we ask that you would forgive us for those times when we've held tight to things, when we've not been generous in the way that you are generous. When we've held on to the thing that you've given us and not used it to bless others. So Lord, please stir our hearts and help us to be a generous people. Help us to notice the needs around us and help us to put other people first, and share with them all that you have given us. In Jesus name. Amen.