

Brancepeth sermon
28 September 2025

1 Timothy: 6: 6-19
Luke 16: 19-end
Psalm 146

May I speak in the name of the Father,

and of the Son,

and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

According to the Church of England,

today is the start of ‘Generosity Week’, and so, inevitably,

I have been asked to talk about *generous giving*.

But as I prepared for this morning, I realised

that I had two very different things to say –

and that as well as meaning I might end up speaking

for slightly longer than normal,

this would also involve me wearing two very different *hats*.

So I want you to imagine, first, that I'm wearing a preacher's hat –
whatever that would look like.

Wearing this hat, my job is to preach on the
passages of scripture that we've just heard,
wherever they take us –
whether that lines up with the message of 'Generosity Week' or not...

And the reason I say that is because,
looking at Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus,
it's not quite the story of gratitude and generosity
that one might have hoped for, for a 'Generosity Week' sermon.
It's less an encouraging invitation to living generously,
and more an uncomfortable challenge to the rich.

Now, it would be easy if this were just about
the Elon Musks of this world,
about the *seriously* rich.

And it's true, I think that one of the implications of this passage
is that there shouldn't be any billionaires in the world.

But focusing on the *extravagantly* rich is dangerous,
because it lets the rest of us off the hook.
So I want you to notice one part of Jesus' description
of the rich man in his story:
that rich man 'feasted sumptuously every day'.
You can tell this man was rich, in other words,
because he had *more than enough to eat*, every day.
He probably even threw food away that he didn't need.
That, in Jesus' day, was enough to mark this man out as rich.

The thing is, though, that it's also enough
to mark someone out as pretty well off here and now.
One in seven households in the UK struggle to
put enough food on the table, week by week, to feed themselves.
And for a lot of those households, that struggle is severe.
In January of this year, roughly two and a half million adults in the UK
skipped eating for at least one whole day
because they couldn't afford enough food

for themselves and their family.¹

Two and a half million adults.

The fact that *I* don't have to worry about paying for my next meal,

the fact that I don't have to worry about

whether I and my family can afford a balanced diet,

can get not just *enough* food, but *good* food, every day -

well, that already means that compared to

many people in our country -

and *huge* numbers of people around the world - I'm wealthy.

By the measure that Jesus was using, *I* am rich.

Now, I don't know any of your financial situations,

but my guess is that there are bound to be some of you

for whom money is much more of a worry than it is for me,

some of you for whom making ends meet requires

real care and creativity,

perhaps some of you who wake up in the night worrying

about how to pay all your bills

¹ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking#tabs/Round-16>

And, if that's you, then what I am about to say is *not addressed to you*.

It's addressed to those like me who are, well, financially comfortable,
people without any serious financial anxieties,
people who don't have to worry about their normal expenditure,
and so people who, like me, count as rich by Jesus' standards.

And, for *us*, Jesus' words make for *very* uncomfortable reading.

It's easy, of course, to tone them down,
and to say that they're not *really* about how much wealth we have,
but just about our *attitude* to it –
not about money as such, but about the *love* of money,
as our passage from 1 Timothy described it.

But Jesus is a bit more uncompromising than that.

I said at the start that I was wearing a preacher's hat for this bit.

It might have been more honest to say
that I was wearing a hypocrite's hat.

Because the message of Jesus
that it's my responsibility to preach on this morning
is obviously a message that is a challenge to me
as much as for anyone else here–

and it is obviously a message that I don't live up to –
a message that, to be honest, I manage to ignore most of the time.
Because I have to face up to the fact that
Jesus says there is something *very wrong* about a world, a community,
where *I* have more than enough,
while others have much less than they need –
and where, to be frank, I am not doing very much to put that right.
You see, it is pretty clear to me that when Jesus sees a rich person,
a well-off and comfortable person,
he doesn't first think, 'Oh, haven't they done well for themselves!'
or, 'They must have worked hard for that!'
He thinks, '*Something has gone wrong here.*
They have more than enough,
and yet just down the road, there's a *Lazarus*
who can't make ends meet.
And that's a problem that, to Jesus, cries out for redress.
And so I can't see how to preach on this passage without, in effect,
preaching against myself,
and probably against some of you, too.

Because we *are* the beneficiaries of a deeply unequal society
and the Jesus whom we worship finds that inequality *offensive*.

Now, there are all kinds of responses that we might give –
all sorts of ways in which these stark inequalities can be tackled.

Some of it is about matters of policy and economics
that are largely out of our hands, except when it comes to
the votes we cast on election day –

because it's about the redistribution of wealth,
it's about having a really good benefits system,
it's about all those measures that work to even out the
levels of wealth in our society,
and genuinely ensure that none are left behind.

We tend to think of those as political rather than religious matters,
but I think they *have* to be part of our response to Jesus' challenge.

But, much as I would like to think that

I don't *really* need to worry about Jesus' challenge myself,
because of the proportion of my income that goes to the tax office,
I can't really imagine the Jesus who told this parable
letting me get away with that as an answer.

Because the fact that remains that
some of us are well off while others of us are really struggling,
and that Jesus' response to that situation
is never to blame the poor for their poverty,
but to say, 'Woe to you who are rich!'

And so, when I read this parable,
I hear a challenge that I know I am reluctant to take seriously,
a challenge that I wish I could avoid,
a challenge that I feel a complete hypocrite
to be talking about from behind this lectern.
I hear Jesus saying to me, 'You have more than enough;
others have less than they need.
What are you going to do about it?'

And that's the point where
slightly awkwardly, I'm going to take my preacher's hat off.
and put on a churchwarden's hat instead.
And the rest of what I say will be more of a notice than a sermon.
Because I've been asked to say something about
giving to the church.

Now, I do *not* want to pretend that giving to St Brandon's
is the main way, the most obvious way,
in which we can respond to Jesus' challenge to the rich.
I really don't think it is –
so what I say wearing my churchwarden's hat
is *not* the answer to what I just said wearing my preacher's hat –
but I *am* going to say a word about that giving,
because I do think it is important in its own way.

Two caveats as I start, though.

First, if you *are* struggling to make ends meet,
if money is a source of real anxiety to you –
then what I'm about to say is not for you.

You can switch off from this point,
all the way through until we start on the creed.
Second, if you are *not* struggling –
if you have enough, or more than enough –
I do still want you to think, in response to Jesus' parable,
about how you might get some of your abundance
to those who do not have enough –
whether that is through charitable giving or
through other ways of using your resources to help –
given what we have just heard of Jesus' message,
that has to be a higher priority than
what I'm about to say about giving to St Brandon's.

But having said both of those things,
I do still want to ask those of you who *are* in a position to do so,
that you *also* think about your giving to St Brandon's.
Because we are, as a church, struggling –
we are struggling to meet our own costs,
and struggling to keep up our giving to the wider church.

Covering all our costs and obligations as a church

costs a lot more than £1,000 a week, these days.

Fuel costs have gone up. Insurance has gone up.

Everything has gone up.

And our income has gone down –

not because people are being less generous,

but because people have moved away,

or are no longer with us.

And we are facing some particularly challenging costs at present:

we need to pay for roof repairs, to avoid some worrying leaks;

we need to pay for repairs to some of our chairs and benches –

as those of you who witnessed the spectacular collapse

of Hester's chair a couple of weeks back will realise.

We need to pay for repairs to our lighting system,

not least so that we can turn on this corona again.

That's impossible at the moment, and we're facing

several thousand pounds of rewiring before it will come back on.

Now that's a gloomy message, I know,

but I don't actually say it in a spirit of gloom –

because I know that St Brandon's is a church that
runs on generosity – on *your* generosity;
I know that your generosity is what keeps the building open,
it's what keeps our life together flourishing,
it's what enables the church to be a resource
not just for this congregation,
but for the wider community;
it's what enables us to give to charity,
financially and in many other ways.

I *know* that St Brandon's is a generous church,
and that giving to St Brandon's *is* one of the ways in which we
each take something from our own resources,
and pool it to make of it a gift
that we try to share with everyone around us.

And *all* of that happens only because of *your amazing generosity*.

And I know that it will go *on* happening
because of *your amazing generosity*.

So it is very much in that spirit of gratitude for your generosity,
gratitude that you are people who share the resources you have,

that I am asking those of you who are in a position to do so
please to consider increasing your giving again –
or, if you're not already a regular giver,
to consider becoming one.

We do need your generosity, more than ever.

And finally, if I can add a side note,
which will be the least sermony, most notice-y bit of this whole talk
can I ask those of you who are already giving regularly,
but who are *still* paying by Standing Order from your bank,
please, please, please move over to the Parish Giving system.

It's safe, it's simple to set up,
and it makes life *so* much easier for the treasurer.

Vickie can explain it to you, or I can;
it's a national scheme, very well run,
and it gives you complete control over
how much you give each month,
and it works *so much better* than older ways of paying.

Now, if you want to know more about the church's financial situation,
or about the challenges we're facing,
or about other ways in which you might be able to help,
please do talk to me afterwards.

But for now, let me finish with a prayer from St Ignatius of Loyola
that is one of the prayers suggested for Generosity Week:

Lord, take as your right,
And receive as my gift,
All my freedom, my memory,
My understanding and my will.
Whatever I am and whatever I possess,
You have given it to me;
I restore it all to you again,
To be at your disposal,
According to your will.
Give me only a love for you,
And the gift of your grace;
Then I am rich enough,
And ask for nothing more. *Amen*