

The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

Sermon

Sunday 31 July 2022: Angela Hannafin

Good morning and welcome to another Sofa Sermon. Let's dive into the scripture for today, from Luke's gospel.

¹³ Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me."

¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" ¹⁵ Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."

¹⁶ Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. ¹⁷ He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. ¹⁹ And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' ²¹ "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

The American writer John Ortberg tells a marvellous version of this Bible story which I must condense, although the story in all its glory is marvellous. A workaholic CEO in Silicon Valley worked 14-hour days. At some point he would retire to enjoy it all, he told himself. He recognised his life was becoming unbalanced, but he told himself he would attend to his health when things calmed down. The Managing Director of the company came to him one day with the opportunity of a lifetime. It would mean a lot of work, but he was up for it. The CEO told his wife, we will now be financially secure and can finally go on that big holiday we want.

In the night his wife woke up and noticed her husband wasn't in bed. She found him in the study, head on the desk. Except when she touched him, he was cold. The paramedics later told her he had had a massive heart attack and had been there for hours.

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At his memorial service, people spoke about his accomplishments. They had a large marble memorial column for him. They wrote these words on it – Visionary – Innovator – Leader – Entrepreneur. And they also wrote his favourite word – Success. They put up the stone and all went home.

“Then when it was dark and no one was present to note what was taking place, the angel of God was sent to this cemetery. Unseen and unheard, the angel of God made his way to the memorial stone. There the angel traced with a finger the single word God had chosen to summarise this wealthy, busy, respectable, successful man's life. FOOL”.

When I first read this version of the Bible story, I had chills running down my back. I still do.

It's not that the man was evil, but a fool. He lacked good sense or good judgement. He was making the wrong choices. He was focusing on the wrong things. This was a tale told by Jesus in response to a request to mediate in a family quibble about money. Was Jesus saying he was also a fool to be caught up in family arguments about finances? The man was warned to be careful about every type of greed. Instead, Jesus said we are to be rich towards God.

What does it mean to be rich towards God? Our life is not made up of our possessions, Jesus warns. In God's eyes, we are not the sum of everything in our bank or savings account. In God's eyes, we are not defined by the car we drive, or where we live, which may sound difficult if you've moved to a respectable part of town. But there's nothing wrong with these things. They just don't make you rich towards God.

Bring rich towards God is getting our priorities right. It's having a light hold on the things that we own; it's making sure that we are spending enough time with God, it's loving people and enjoying them, it's knowing where your gifts are and using them to bring glory to God. It's being secure in yourself that you stop worrying about yourself and are intent on making others look good. These are all signs of a life which is rich towards God.

Someone once gave a talk at church. He had a tray of things at the front of church which represented the stuff of our lives: a doll's house for our home, a toy car for our cars, you get the drift. He then put a red sticker on all of these things, and explained that everything which had a red sticker on it was temporary. It will not last. It will fade away. We get a little thrill when we obtain it. But that doesn't last long. If you are living for all the things that are represented on this tray, he said, you are living for what is temporary. The speaker continued to put speakers

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on everything he saw. There was just one thing that wasn't temporary. He asked a little girl to join him on stage and put a blue sticker on the collar of her dress. "When you get to the end of your life, and take in your last breath, what do you want your life to have been about? What will make it rich in the eyes of God". 'People'. Andi Hofbauer came here this week, from St Aidan's, to give a talk which she entitled 'Sharing Lives'. She spoke about her own ministry and the work of St Aidan's. Hers is a life which is rich towards God and inspiring to listen to.

The things which last, which are rich in this world, are God, and people. Jesus told us to do two things – to love God and love people, and those things are both incredibly easy and incredibly difficult. They are simple commands, but they require a lifetime to get right. That's because we are broken and needy and weak. And because God asks us to do hard stuff like forgiving each other, like praying for people who make our lives difficult, like keeping on trusting in him even when we can't yet see around the corner. Forgiveness, endurance, hope – these are hallmarks of the life of a Christian and of something who is rich towards God.

And so I ask you - are you rich towards God? Where are you investing yourself? Do you need to turn back to God today? Don't wait. Do it now. AMEN.

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Take some post-its and put them on the things that you own in the house. Write 'temporary' on them. Now write 'eternal' on another post-it note and put it on yourself.
- What might it mean for you to be rich towards God?
- What might God be saying to you today? Can you stop to listen to him now?

Let's pray,

"God our Father, we thank you for your rich love to us and for all the wonderful things you offer to us. Help us to turn away from the things of the world which look so enticing but actually offer very little. May you draw us back to our first love. In Jesus' name. AMEN."