

**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also -
A harvest sermon.**

So, last week “sex” this week “money”...I’m afraid we have blown social niceties out of the window in our preaching for the season.

I pondered how to approach this sermon,
thinking of the different personalities in any congregation
and the differing sensitivities of such a diverse community of people.
Should I be theological, spiritual or practical?
Who would appreciate a direct appeal, shaped by facts and figures?
Who would be inspired by the Spirit and a wider vision?

Well, I decided to take the approach
that I would fiercely criticise any curate for using,
which is to put everything but the kitchen sink into this sermon
and to hope that something I say will have an impact on you!

A few of us were musing on the expression “d.v.” *deo volente* which translates as “God willing” and is the sort of thing you might respond to the parting remark, “see you in the morning”. It reminded me of another phrase, much loved by two elderly Caribbean members of my Leicester congregation, whose response to mention of any future plan was “if God spares me”.

Both phrases are probably used without sufficient care and attention.

How often do we consider,
in any depth of seriousness,
just how much we are dependent on God,
for our life, our health and our being?

In our confident, post-Enlightenment world,
humankind has a terribly lazy sense of its own capacity.
Generally speaking, we expect to wake up tomorrow morning,
to be healed from our minor illnesses and scrapes,
to have food in the larder or the fridge,
to be fit to travel,
I could go on and on...

And more than that,
we somehow think that we deserve all this,
that we have earned it by our hard work, our own endeavours.

Which, if we stopped to think for a moment is simply utter rubbish!

You could call it luck, accident or providence,
but if you enjoy all these things,
it is because you were born at this time,
in this place, to those parents,
when any number of other fates might have been yours.

We are extraordinarily blessed by the generosity of God
who loves us unconditionally
and who provides all that we have
without any attention at all to whether we deserve it or not.
It is gift, grace, gratuity.

So my first invitation to you today is to do something that will cost you nothing -
and that is to take time to reflect deeply
on God's generous love and provision for you.
God's generous love and provision in the everyday things of life –
the small joys
and in the great mystery that is life.

As we travel through Creationtide
there will be many moments to encourage you to do this,
and I hope that your encounter with Gaia
will provoke a sense of awe, wonder and gratitude
for our planet home and the life we share.

That's the easy bit,
well the second easiest thing I'm going to ask you to think about this morning!
(The easiest one comes at the end).

The second thing I'm going to ask you to think about is the teaching of Jesus
about money.

Today's gospel reading contains an exchange sometimes known as one of the "hard teachings" of Jesus, the suggestion that the rich young man should give everything away so that he could follow Jesus.

Throughout the ages Christians have struggled with this counsel of perfection, sometimes arguing, as did Margaret Thatcher, that wealth can provide good things for others through charitable giving and philanthropy.

Those who have taken the radical approach, such as St Frances of Assisi and other members of religious communities, were recognised as a special case, a rare breed you might say.

The counsel of perfection is not for all of us, but Jesus' hard sayings often point us in a direction, they ask us to look towards a different end goal, to re-orientate our focus.

Jesus asked the rich young man to take a step back and ask himself what is most important in life?

Do you care more about treasure in heaven or treasure on earth?

Treasure in heaven,
a right relationship with God,
sharing in the building of the Kingdom,
are not those things that we should long for with our whole hearts?

And yet, as Jesus so gently points out to the rich young man, our preoccupations with the treasure we enjoy on earth gets in the way.

I don't think, by the way,

that God is very interested in what we do with our money at one level,

I think that God is interested in the state of our souls.

But, ask yourself,

what does the way that you manage your money say about the state of your soul?

One of the things that is extremely unhealthy

about our unwillingness to talk transparently about money in many settings, including the church,
is that we are so rarely held accountable for our use of money.
It is many years since my bank manager, or before that my father, sat me down and asked where my money was being spent.

We have tried, increasingly, in the Cathedral community to be transparent about money,
about what we spend it on and where it comes from.
If you haven't heard me say this before, let me paint a very broad brush picture for you...

This Cathedral takes around £1.7 million a year to run, of that £700 thousand on the building £250 thousand is spent on music, £160 thousand on ministry (the clergy and housing), and the rest on other things.

Currently, we raise about £1.5 million. You will notice that this sum is smaller than our expenditure and this is true, the Dean and Chapter are investing about £200 thousand a year from our savings to ensure that we are fit for purpose and able to make a bigger impact in the world. Of our total income £400 thousand comes from the Church Commissioners (funds invested over many years that are distributed by the central church) which include the stipends of the dean and two clergy, £100 thousand comes from visitors and about £50 thousand comes from the congregation. The rest comes from rental paid by the school and events.

Now, not everything is about money, and some of you give hours of unpaid voluntary service to the Cathedral which enriches our life together and is a precious gift.

But today is about money and the difference money could make,
beyond the good of your souls!
So here comes the easy bit, what difference could you make?

At present, under half of our congregation give regularly to the Cathedral.
If you do not currently give, please consider doing so.

At present, average giving is £10 per head per week. If that were doubled,
We would be matching the average gift per head per week across all cathedrals.
If you give regularly, thank you.

Please consider increasing the amount you give.

With increased giving we could start to replenish our savings,
We could employ a community worker to support our work with people
experiencing homelessness,
or a music outreach worker,
or a full time youth worker to partner with the school.

Please be assured that we are working hard
to increase our income across all income streams
so that we can not only maintain the things that matter to you,
including our music, pastoral care, care of the building and so on,
but so that we can build strong foundations for the future.

But I'm inviting you to play a part and, frankly,
a much bigger part, in that privileged responsibility,
to give generously because we have received so freely from God.

I'm deliberately talking about long term, regular, everyday giving here,
because it is our daily use of money that most clearly expresses our discipleship,
our listening to and following Jesus.

Today, as Neil has already explained,
we are doing everything we can
to make it easy for you to give regularly.
If we can do any more,
or if you want to know more,
please ask!