

*Year C, Proper 12 (31 July 2013)*

*Ecc 1.2, 12- 14; 2.18-23; Luke 12.13-21*

*St Philip's, Earl's Court Road*

This morning 's gospel reading made me ask myself 'What is the role of a preacher?'

Sometimes our readings are hard to understand. The cultural gap between 21st century Britain and first century Palestine is huge, It's unsurprising that we sometimes find it difficult to make sense of the Bible.

And this gives the preacher something to do. The preacher can act as a bridge between two worlds.

At other times we think we understand what the Bible is saying. But we're not sure we agree with it. It appears unreasonable.

And here again the preacher has a job to do.

But today's reading from Luke's Gospel couldn't be clearer, its argument more compelling:

The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger

ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

The story is simple and persuasive. 'You can't take it with you'

What more can a preacher add?

I suspect our problems with this story come not when we're listening to it, but later. We might recognise ourself as 'one who stores up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God'. We might resolve that 'something has to change'. And yet very little does change.

Elsewhere in Luke's Gospel, in the Parable of the Sower, Jesus talks about the man who :

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'hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.'

That could be us, listening to this morning's Gospel reading.

We understand it is a mistake to invest our energy and our hopes in that which cannot last. But we return to the rest of our lives, and before long the cares of the world and the lure of wealth encourage the conviction to fade.

The man in Jesus's story is, of course, you and me.

We may not have more grain than places to store it. But in some corner of our lives, we make sure we have more than we need.

So let us learn from this man with not enough barns and more than enough grain. How can we avoid his fate?

The first thing to notice about the man is that his life is self-contained, his talk self-referential. He is living a life turned in on itself. Listen again to what he says. Notice how often the word 'I' appears and the complete lack of reference to anyone else:

'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods'

If there is one thing about which the church needs to be challenging our contemporary world, it is the article of faith - an article of secular faith - that 'it's my life'.

But our lives are not our own, certainly not simply our own. At the heart of Christian discipleship is a decision to recognise that our lives are not our own. They then become ours again in a new and far more profound sense.

God points out to the rich man it's impossible to keep other people out of the story for ever:

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'the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

A second point in our gospel reading from which we might learn is that the desire for money is never simply about money.

Jesus tells his parable in response to a man who is having a dispute with his brother about the family inheritance. Family inheritances are not simply about money. They're about approval, fairness,

The gospel reading is telling us that when we are concerned or upset about a family inheritance, whenever being owed more than we have has become a major preoccupation for us, then we're in the same territory as the rich man and need to hear the words of Jesus. In storing up treasures for ourselves, we risk being not rich towards God.

God's words to the rich man as he approaches death:

'This very night your life is being demanded of you'

could be God's words to any of us at any time:

'Your life is being demanded of you.'

Our lives are not our own. Our money is not our own,  
Let us be rich towards God.