

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : August 4th, 2019
“Seventh Sunday after Trinity”

TRINITY 7 – 4 AUGUST 2019

When, some years ago I was an Area Dean, I used to assist the Archdeacon in carrying out his annual inspections of all the church buildings in the Deanery – and in my particular area there were 17 buildings of varying age and size and antiquity. So, armed with clipboard and checklist, I would meet the Churchwardens and proceed to inspect everything from downpipes to registers, from churchyards to cellars. I became very aware of how much work actually goes into ensuring the ongoing care of our churches. It also made me very aware that many churches are led by people who have wide knowledge and a high regard for the community they seek to serve. Indeed churches have to be registered formally with the Charity Commission – and in order to achieve status as a charity, part of what a church has to prove is that it is of public benefit to the local community – that’s the formal phrase – ‘of public benefit’. So it follows that some religious groups which are closed to outsiders cannot demonstrate such a characteristic. But here at Christ Church we have to show that what we do is open to all and of public benefit. So the projects in which churches become involved are all about generously serving the local community. All of these activities – and many more – aim at reaching out to the local communities in a spirit of Christian goodwill and generosity. This Church is no less generous in its readiness to serve the local community – to be ‘of public benefit’ as it has been over 160 years. You just have to look at some of the past and present projects of this church to get a sense of that: that generous service is at the heart of all we strive to be as Christians.

This attitude of generosity, which Christian congregations so readily display, of course goes counter to today's culture of consumerism with its side effects of greed. Many of us are personally all too aware of the temptation with which we are bombarded, mainly through advertising and the media, that security, happiness and peace of mind comes through possessions. Human beings instinctively feel they have to have the latest of everything....and the advertisers know that all too well. And the advertisers are clever, very clever. I give you one simple example. Not so long ago car registration numbers changed once a year – now they change twice a year to try to tempt people to keep up to date by buying the latest new car. New versions are produced all the time so that you have to buy the latest model with the most advanced gadgets. There are other examples I could give you, but you get the gist. I admit that I used to be one of those people and so I would change my car every 2 or 3 years. Now – well I've changed and find I am very content with what I have. My car is happily approaching its 5th birthday and I hope we will have many more happy years together – but then I might be tempted sometime ...to change my mind and buy a new and better one.

But the point is this - for many of us, if we just stop and think, we soon begin to realise that what we have to live on is enough – indeed, we might remember the slogan: 'enough is enough'. Yes, it undoubtedly helps that we might actually have enough to live on without worrying but the wisdom of Mr Micawber holds true – living within our means is happiness where finances are concerned and even sixpence over that is misery.

Today's readings point out the foolishness of living in a selfish, greedy way and the wisdom of living with our security on the eternal things that Christ came to teach. Christ teaches us a whole new way of living and being. It is not so much a question of giving away our possessions, but more about changing our attitude to them and recognising them for what they are – gifts to thank God for, but lent to us to use as

good stewards. Paul encourages the congregations in Colossae to live the good life and to put away – indeed he says ‘put to death’ those things which are unworthy of us. Take away the old and put on the new, he urged. Then in the Gospel, the rich man is condemned in the parable because he has stored up things for himself but is not rich towards God or his fellow human beings. We need constantly to give thanks to God for all he has given us and use what we have as good stewards, remembering just that – that we are loaned all we have and cannot take it with us in any shape or form.

So it is, maybe, getting into the mind-set of delighting in simple things and living lives as uncomplicated as it is possible to be. That’s partly why we are encouraging everyone to bring something to church to share as part of our autumnal creation tide display as we give thanks for the amazing world around us.

So what is the message for today? The parable of the rich fool comes in reaction to a request for Jesus to resolve a dispute over inheritance. Jesus responds abruptly to the complaining party, asking ‘who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ It is this way that Jesus ensures his subsequent stern warning against greed is directed at all of us who are ‘not rich towards God’ – which means, as Paul encourages the Colossians, we must always ‘seek the things that are above where Christ is, for Christ is all and in all.’ And for that, thanks be to God.