

**Sunday 31 July 2016**

**10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity (Proper 13)**

**St Mary's, Stoke D'Abernon.**

**Luke 12.13-21; Colossians 3.1-11.**

**You can call me Al, the Rich Fool**

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In my Bible today's reading from Luke is helpfully headed 'The Parable of the Rich Fool'. I've actually come up with a name for our rich fool. His name is Al, and I'll tell you why in a minute.

The story goes like this: A man is blessed with a bumper harvest. What is his response? His response is to devote all his energies to figuring out how to save it, store it all away, so that the years ahead will be comfortable and safe. But little does he know that he will die that very night, and then all the time and effort and energy he has spent on accumulating and looking after his wealth, his money, his personal comfort, will count for... absolutely nothing! He ends up a stranger in a strange world holding no currency – just like the man in Paul Simon's song 'You can call me Al'.

And God calls him a fool for it. Poor Al. Poor, stupid Al.

It seems such an obvious and straightforward lesson this morning that really I could just leave it there and we could all have tea ten minutes early.

Unfortunately for you, however, I'm afraid I can't do that.

You see, it's all so puzzling. I mean, we know this stuff. Every time we come to church we hear how important it is not to focus our lives on acquiring wealth yet will still do it. Perhaps I am being presumptuous when I say 'we', but it certainly applies to me. I am Al, and perhaps there is something of Al in all of us.

If I were to conduct an honest audit of how much of my mental, emotional and physical energy is given over to worrying about money or even just thinking about money, it would not yield a good result. Maybe I should join Al-anon.

Jesus gives this focus its true name – an ugly name – greed. And he specifically warns us to guard against it [Luke 12.15].

So why do we do it? What is it that drives us to devote our energy mainly to building things up for ourselves, rather than giving them away? What makes us greedy, in other words?

Perhaps we can find an answer by looking at more closely at Al's motivation. When Al starts calculating and planning and plotting how to save and protect his assets, what is driving him?

It is his desire for security – a life free from care and worry. He says to himself, 'Once I've got this all locked away, I'll have plenty of good things. I'll be able to take things easy; to eat, drink and be merry.' [Luke 12.19]

And God calls him a fool because of it. He's a fool because he is bending all his powers to a achieving a false security.

Like Al, we too long for security and peace and freedom from worry, and like Al we are fools, because we are falling for the great lie that pervades every nook and cranny of our world – the lie that having money means having security and therefore, peace and fulfilment.

It is a lie because we can never find security in this world. We might acquire millions but, like Al, we could lose our lives at any moment. And then what? Imagine what it would be like to meet our Lord and have him ask what we have to show for all the gifts he gave us? Would we find ourselves in a strange world with no currency?

There is only one thing that we can truly rely on for security, and that is our relationship with God. God is the one thing that is always constant, who exists on this side of death and on the other side of death.

Jesus tells us quite plainly: a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions [12.15]. The truly secure life is the one that happens when we put God first – when we are rich towards God [12.21] – when our main focus is to give, rather than to get.

Jesus promises us – and he never lies - that when the main focus of our life is to give rather than to get or have, that is when we get true security, fulfilment and peace, because that is when we get closer to God. Jesus calls this 'building up treasure in heaven' [12.33].

So we are greedy because we fall for the lie of false security.

But it is very hard to change our focus from getting to giving, and it is scary, giving up control over building our own security.

Jesus knows this and reassures us. Our reading this morning forms part of a wider section in Luke in which Jesus talks about fear, worry and God. And he goes to great lengths in his teaching to emphasise that we must never worry about what will happen to us because ... God loves us. He says:

*'Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.'* [Luke 12.6-7]

And then after he tells the story of Al, he goes on directly to say this:

*'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes [12.22-23] Who by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why worry about the rest [12.25-26]... And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagans world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek is kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.'* [12.29-31]

This is what Al forgot, and what we all forget. We can truly be safe in letting go control of our own security because God loves us. If we put God first, everything else in our lives will fall into place, and we need fear nothing from death, because we will have built up treasure in heaven.

Unlike poor Al.

Amen.