

Title: "There are two sides to every coin"

Theme: Generosity and trust, in the face of Greed and Worry

Readings: 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15;
Luke 12: 16-30 (Key)

Date: 8/10/17

Location: St Mary's

Other Info: Harvest

Luke 12:14-30 (NIVUK)

¹⁴ Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' ¹⁵ Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops."

¹⁸ 'Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

²⁰ 'But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" ²¹ 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'

Do not worry

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life^[a]? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

²⁷ 'Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.'

Introduction

A little harvest quiz for you all to get your brains working this morning, firstly whose images are on the new £10 and £5 notes?

Winston Churchill and Jane Austen

Okay, a slightly more important question, when is the last day that the old round one pound coins are legal tender in this country?

October 15th

Now I wonder if any of you might have a coin in your pocket or bag or purse. Any English coin from 1p all the way up to a £2. If you do, would you be willing to get it out for me and hold it in your hand while I talk – don't worry I'm not going to ask you to give it away at the end or anything like that – although if you do have any old £1 coins and wanted to get rid of them into the collection today... just a suggestion. If anyone doesn't have a coin easily to hand I have a whole bunch of 2ps up here that you can come and have and keep with my blessings.

And the reason I'm asking you to get out a coin and hold/look at it today is because in today's passage from Luke we see Jesus confronting us with two very related, but opposite problems which we have as human beings. Its like two sides of the same coin – on the one hand the problem of wanting too much – of holding to tightly to the things we have, and on the other the fear of having too little.

Greed - Generosity

So shortly before today's passage, Jesus approached by a man who wants his brother to share the inheritance with him. So, seeing the man's motivation, Jesus tells him this story – to remind him of what is really important in life. The story involves the fortunes of a farmer who has a bumper crop and doesn't have room for it all. So rather than letting his resources waste away, he devises a plan to create more storage space – something to which I can currently relate. Now it is crucial to realize that the decisions the man makes to address his dilemma are perfectly normal and prudent, but the rationale, philosophy and desires that result from the decision are the problem.

This man believes that what he has **is his**. Several times in the next few verses he speaks in first-person terms about what he has: *my crops . . . my barns . . . my grain . . . my goods . . . myself*. There is no hint of an awareness of the blessings which he has received or his responsibility towards others. In his view he has earned it and deserves it and so he can relax "*Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*"

And it can be easy for us to sit here in our minds eye and go, oh yes well I don't have a massive amount of money so that's not a problem for me. Or to sit there and look at all the things we give away, and think the story doesn't apply to us. But the truth is that so often, I, and I'm sure I'm not alone in this, fall into the trap of thinking that what I have is mine, be that money or time or talents, - its mine to do with as I please, and I resent anyone trying to take it from me:

I apologize to any of you who have heard this story before, but J. John tells a great story of a guy on his own in airport lounge – who bought a latte and a bag of doughnuts. He sat at a table where there was another guy reading his paper. He opened the bag of doughnuts and took one. The other guy looked, reached down and took one, to the astonishment of the first guy. He did it again and again and our guy finds himself getting increasingly annoyed, but not saying anything. How dare he take my doughnuts! The newspaper guy looks in the bag, sees one doughnut left, rips it in half, eats his half and pushes the bag towards our guy, before getting up and going to his flight. What a cheek! When our first guy gets up for his flight, he sees his own bag of doughnuts on top of his suitcase!

God owns all the doughnuts. God gives us all that we have. Everything, every breath that we take is a gift from God to us, given not for us to hoard and keep for ourselves – but for us to use generously. The question isn't "is God going to bless us me" but rather, "how am I going to handle the blessings that God has already poured out all over me?"

Now there is nothing wrong with being prudent and wise with our money – we are called to be good stewards as a church and as individuals with what God has given us, and sometimes that will mean saving money away to help with the future. What Jesus is saying is that we need to get our priorities right. Things are to be stewarded, not to be hoarded selfishly but to be used to benefit those around us. Jesus is not saying possessions are bad, but that the selfish pursuit of them is pointless in the end.

I guess the question you and I need to ask ourselves about the things we have is this if God asked you to give it all away tomorrow – would you? Could you?

We are called as followers of Jesus to be radically generous with what we have, and as we come today and give thanks to God for his harvest to us, we are reminded again of this challenge. Are there bits of our lives, be that our wealth, our families, our attitudes towards others or anything else where we find ourselves saying to God, "NO, that's mine!" Jesus wants to very gently and humbly come and remind us

that its all his – he made it and he made us, and he loves us and wants what’s best for us – he wants to be Lord of all our lives, because he knows that’s the best place for us to be.

Worrying – Trusting

Now if you like that’s one side of our coins – the problem of wanting too much. But if you turn your coin over, the flip side of that is the worry of not having enough.

Now let’s see if you can get the next line:

Here's a little song I wrote

You might want to sing it note for note:???

Don’t worry, be happy.

That was Bobby McFerrin’s idea of what we should do, that the opposite of worrying is being happy. But of course that’s not really the antidote to worry. If we are not going to pursue material things, then how should we deal with our physical needs? Jesus’ answer to this question is really fairly simple: "Trust God." Using creation as the example, Jesus points to the tender care of the heavenly Father and asks people to consider how gentle God is. If God can care for his other creatures, he can care for you.

Jesus explains his call away from worry by noting that life is more than food or clothing. The deepest dimension of life is relationship with God and with others. In 10:25-28 Jesus made it clear that real life has to do with relationship. Living is more than having; it is being in relationship with God and relating well to others. Placing concern for our daily needs in God’s hands is part of what it means to have relationship with God (11:3-4) and so Jesus points to the birds (v. 24), the lilies (v. 27) and the grass (v. 28) arguing that if God cares for them, he certainly will care for us as well.

Beyond the illustrations from creation, there is a practical reason not to worry says Jesus: it does no good, worrying does not help! In fact, anxiety and stress are some of the biggest causes of health problems in today’s society. Worry actually reflects the tension we have when we feel that life is out of our control; it is the product of feeling isolated, alone. But we never have to be alone- God has promised to always be with us – no matter how bleak the world around us may seem to be.

So we should not be anxious. Jesus reminds us that God is *our heavenly Father who knows our needs*. It is no accident that Jesus refers to God as the Father in this context, for our intimate relationship with God should encourage us that we will receive his care.

I was standing the other day at the bottom of the stairs when I heard the words “Daddy catch!” I turned to see my Daughter’s teddy halfway through the air towards me. She was trusting me to catch and keep safe her most precious possession. And then a moment later, after I had caught it, I was horrified to find that she wasn’t referring just to the teddy and that she was throwing herself towards me as well. Expecting me to catch her. There was in her mind not one shadow of a doubt that her daddy would let her fall, that he would catch her. That’s what this passage is all about, two sides of a coin – greed and worry, or generosity and trust. That’s who we are to be with our heavenly father. We are to be his children, who trust all that we have to our Father, removing our greed or desire for more by being radically generous with what we have, and reminding ourselves that it is all God’s anyway – throwing our teddy to him. And then we are to throw ourselves after it as well, to trust in him for all that we need.

End

Now, I wonder if you would look at the coins you've been holding all the way through once more, and if you turn to the heads side of the coin, I wonder if you can see what the words say around the edge of the coin? Elizabeth II D G REG F D Date Does anyone know what it means?

It's a Latin engraving with two sentences represented by initials on it D G REG "[Dei Gratia Regina](#)" meaning, "By the grace of God, Queen" and F D meaning "Fidei defensatrix" [Defender of the Faith](#). So every time we pick up a coin, we are reminded of the grace of God to us and his provision. I hope that perhaps today we can reimagine those words just a little, so that every time we look at a coin from now on, we might be reminded of these two truths: that all we have is Dei Gratia – by God's grace, and that we need not fear because we can fides (trust or have faith) in Deum (God).

Amen