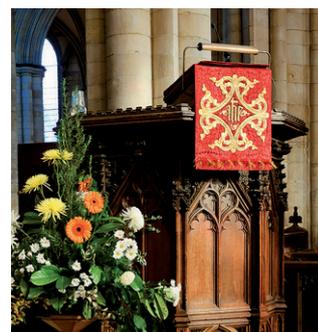


# Sermon notes

Seasons of Giving



Winter



Spring



Summer



Autumn



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### Luke 12:22-34

(NRSV)

*He 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. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you - you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'*

### Suggested readings

Dt 8:11-18 ■ 1 Tim 6:6-10 (17-19)

### Introduction

For most churches, though by no means all, an annual review will focus on a single Sunday, restricting our preaching to a single sermon at one or more Sunday and perhaps a midweek service. This document offers resources for this preaching opportunity. Fish freely in this pool of resources, keep what you like, throw back what is not helpful and, of course, fish in other pools for other resources.

The theme of the seasons of the year will resonate with some preachers and this theme is reflected in the optional review brochure.<sup>1</sup> For some preachers an abridged version of Oscar Wilde's story, *The Selfish Giant*, will offer a creative way in to the biblical material. Alternatively, a single gospel passage, Luke 12:22-34, is offered as a text with some background notes and a sermon outline

### All age worship

A fully resourced all age worship service is available as a free download. This service is built around the theme of the seasons of the year and offers *The Selfish Giant* story (see below) as an optional element to include.

### The Selfish Giant

Oscar Wilde's powerful and moving modern parable, *The Selfish Giant*, offers a creative way into the sermon. An abridged version of the story is available and is accompanied by four optional, full colour cartoons which can enhance the telling of the story.<sup>2</sup>

The story has worked well when told prior to the preaching. It is appropriate both for an all adult congregation and for young people sharing the liturgy of the Word in their own small groups. Of course, it also works well when all ages are in church together. The preacher can then draw on the themes of the story in preaching to adults while young people can discuss the story and make use of the additional resources in the all age worship material (as above).

### Seasons of giving

The theme of the seasons of the year will resonate for some preachers. The bible passages in the optional Seasons brochure (as above) are drawn from a four week sermon series, also called

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*This new word  
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money in our lives.*

*Seasons of Giving.* Both background notes on each passage and sermon reflections are available and some preachers will choose one of these passages as the focus of their sermon.<sup>3</sup> As the background notes and reflections do not explore the Seasons theme the following paragraphs briefly suggest links between the bible passages, the Seasons theme and *The Selfish Giant* story.

- ✚ **Winter:** in this season of cold, of dormant life and little obvious growth we ask, *'what is it that make generosity hard for us?'* *'What are the things that hold us back from giving more than we do?'* For *The Selfish Giant* the unwillingness to share his garden led to endless winter. In the story the hail and rain are invited into the garden. A lack of generosity can often draw into our lives other negative attitudes, a desire for personal aggrandisement, wealth, status and a critical attitude to the misfortune of others. For the rich fool in Luke 12 there was a coldness of heart. This capable farmer acknowledged neither the God who gives all we have nor the needs of the community which depends on his grain (cf. Proverbs 11:26).
- ✚ **Spring:** in this season of new life, of promise we ask, *'what prompts us, moves us to generosity?'* For *The Selfish Giant* the need and tears of a child thawed his heart; so what has moved us to tears, to action, to generosity in our own lives? For one man such moment was when a speaker from Operation Christmas Child told of giving an orange to a child in Romania. The child asked in wonder, *'is all this for me?'* For Zacchaeus in Luke 19 Jesus' self invitation to his home was a springtime of the heart as he responded to grace with generosity and a desire to get his financial house in order
- ✚ **Summer:** in this season when nature is at its richest we ask, *'what does good giving look like?'* For *The Selfish Giant* that winter thaw and springtime moment issued not only in a beautiful garden but a garden that was shared openly and gladly. For a poor widow in Luke 21 giving in the place of worship meant a sacrificial giving which challenged even the outwardly generous giving of the wealthy and which challenges us to proportional giving but also to justice and righteousness in all our dealings with money.
- ✚ **Autumn:** in this season of change, of dying and new life we ask, *'what are the changes in our own lives that prompt new decisions about generous living?'* Life does not stand still and nor do our dealings with money: a new job or a lost job, a new baby or children leaving home, a bereavement, a retirement, a new opportunity. For *The Selfish Giant* there came a time to let go of all that this world holds and to meet again the One who changed his life. Each change means that, as for the rich ruler in Luke 18, we may hear a new word of God to us. This new word does not deny past faithfulness but calls us to a fresh discipleship challenge around the place of money in our lives. There is a specific challenge to look to our wills, to protect and provide for those we love and to leave a generous legacy gift to the church that has nurtured us and to the Christian and other charities that we have supported in our lifetimes.

*faithfulness in the past does not always prepare us for the gospel challenges in the present if wealth is a competing desire*

*Food and clothing are part of what it is to be human ...neither the need nor the concern is sinful.*

Where an annual review includes two Sundays each of the four seasons can be explored and this has been done to good effect. With a single sermon preachers may choose to select a single bible character and passage from the options above. Thus, winter for Zacchaeus may be seen to lie in his self serving and fraudulent money making. Meeting Jesus is that springtime moment and the summer is marked by his commitment to both financial integrity and generous giving. In his story of the widow's mite Luke consciously faces off the showy gifts of the religious leaders and that of a poor widow. Even outwardly generous giving can betray a winter heart where self regard and self reward is the main focus. By contrast good giving, summer giving, is the giving of what we have not what we do not have and we can only guess at how such generosity in the widow was born and nurtured many years previously.

For the rich fool the winter heart is all too obvious yet that rich harvest posed a springtime challenge: what do we do with the wealth that is ours? Is it for our own benefit alone or is it a gift to be received with gratitude and enjoyed with contentment? Is that gift shared generously and justly with the community which depends upon his grain, the price of which can only rise to the harm of the poor if it is stored not sold. We might ask what summer generosity could have looked like had the rich fool shared not stored his grain while his early demise poses in stark terms the question of the legacy we leave behind. Finally for the Young Ruler faithfulness in the past does not always prepare us for the gospel challenges in the present if wealth is a competing desire, an alternative lord, which is not addressed by personal discipleship.

### **Luke 12:22-34: some background notes**

In this passage Luke is using source material that he shares with Matthew (Mt 6;19-34) but provides his own interpretative context by inserting the parable of the Rich Fool immediately before this material. The contrasts are stark: the abundance of a harvest and the concern for adequate food and clothing; the failure to acknowledge God and Jesus' invitation to trust in the provision of God; the self-referencing of the farmer and the challenge to give generously to those in need.

The conclusion of the parable reads, 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up [literally, is treasuring up] things for themselves but is not rich towards God' (Lk 6:21). With this transitional verse and the use of *thēsauros* (*treasure*) Luke introduces material about how disciples are to manage the material concerns of life in the light of the kingdom and the closing challenge about the heart and treasure.

The passage begins with a natural concern for food and clothing. The appeal to the ravens and the lilies of the field does not encourage a casual or careless attitude to what are real material concerns. Food and clothing are part of what it is to be human and essential for human flourishing. So neither the need nor the concern is sinful.

*If our material needs are the concern of a loving God then we must manage these things as the things of God.*

Indeed, says Jesus, God knows that we share with all others these essential needs. But this complex arena of material needs, wealth and possessions can be for us either a focus of worry, a burden to carry or it can be part of God's loving provision for us and a blessing for which we give thanks.

As with so much of the Gospel teaching around wealth there is almost no practical advice offered as an alternative to worry. But if we are not told *what* we should do we are told *who* we should trust and such trust is not at all passive. If our material needs are the concern of a loving God then we must manage these things as the things of God. This means good budgeting, wise financial planning, appropriate saving and responsible borrowing – and each of these challenges will have a different personal context for each disciple. Such active trust is part of seeking the kingdom of God.

Intriguingly the one piece of practical advice that Jesus does give is the command to sell possessions and to give alms to the poor. This verse, Luke 12:33, is not found in Matthew's material but echoes the command to the rich ruler in Luke 18:22. The verse reflects Luke's particular interest in the discipleship of wealth and possessions and, by omitting the reference to all possessions illustrates the comment of Luke Timothy Johnson that, "although Luke speaks consistently about possessions he does not speak about possessions consistently".

There is in scripture no single model for financial discipleship. But while each disciple in his or her context is called to trust God for their needs and to manage well what is entrusted by God all are called to give generously according to our means (Dt 16:17, 2 Cor 8:12).

So, says Jesus in Luke 12:34, what we do with our treasure reveals our hearts. We can in the modern parlance, follow the money And of all that we do with our money it is how we give, or fail to give, that reveals most about how we think, feel and act around money as disciples of Jesus.

### Reveal, renew, remember: a sermon outline on Luke 12

'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Luke 12:34). This important text has three perspectives on how as Christians we should approach the complex and personal question of managing money and generous giving.

First, the text suggests that what we do with our money **reveals our hearts**. Long ago Billy Graham noted that our cheque book was a theological document and not just a financial one. For our cheque book, our ATM withdrawals, our credit and debit cards, our short term loans and our internet banking statements speak about our relationship with money. They may speak of difficult and pressing personal financial situations, some in our control, some out of our control. They may speak of areas of consumer weakness we have, an ability or an inability to manage our money well or of the interests and the passions that we have

*our giving is something of a litmus test, a hallmark if you will, that tells the quality of our financial discipleship*

*Each act of committed giving is a reminder to us that all we have is a gift and that what we have belongs ultimately to the Owner and Giver of all things.*

- ✎ You may wish to illustrate this point by telling the story, *Fools Gold?*: see below
- ✎ A link may be made here to the Selfish Giant for whom the winter in his garden mirrored the winter of his heart in failing to share what he had

Second, the text suggests also that what we do with our money **releases our hearts**. In short, when we determine to make discipleship decisions around money we release our hearts from the captivity of wealth and the trappings of a consumer society. In Luke 12:22-34 Jesus urges his disciples to trust God for what they need and not to worry, to seek first the kingdom and know that all they need will be provided. But there is almost nothing in the way of practical guidance as to what trusting or seeking first the kingdom looks like, save one thing: give generously to those in need. The challenge in this passage is to recognise that our giving is something of a litmus test, a hallmark if you will, that tells the quality of our financial discipleship.

It was not out of anger or disdain for his wealth but out of love for the man that Jesus invited the rich ruler to give generously from his riches. It was out of sadness and not anger that the young man walked away, because the price was too high.

- ✎ You may wish to illustrate this point by telling the story *A Brother Like That*: see below
- ✎ A link may be made here to the Selfish Giant for whom the decision to help a child into a tree and thereby to share his garden released spring into his garden and the richness of summer.

Finally, what we do with our money and in particular giving generously of our money helps us to **remember the Giver**. The book of Deuteronomy constantly reminds the people of Israel that the land they inherit is a given land, a land gifted to them by God. The temptation, however, is to forget this truth and to be seduced into believing that all we have is of our own making (Dt 8: 17-18). Thus the people are not just asked but commanded to tithe because in the giving of a tenth they remind themselves that all they have is a gift from God. The bringing of the first fruits in Dt 26:1-11 is a liturgy in which the bringing of gifts moves from acknowledgment to thanksgiving to confession of faith. The multiple commands to deal justly around loans, to cancel debts and release economic slaves arise out of the deliverance from Egypt and giftedness of the Promised Land.

Each act of committed giving is a reminder to us that all we have is a gift and that what we have belongs ultimately to the Owner and Giver of all things. Only committed, regular, intentional giving can do this. Giving that is casual, that costs us little may reveal our hearts but it can never release our hearts from the captivity of a consumer culture and it can never help us remember the One who entrusts to our stewardship all that we have.

*Chicken Soup for the Soul* by Jack Canfield and Mark V. Hansen (Amazon). It is freely available on the internet and the text is therefore included here with due acknowledgement of the source

The following story is a reminder of how wealth can seduce hearts and minds. Winter can settle on our heart and yet we hardly recognise its presence until disaster strikes or something arrests our hearts. This story can be used as a sermon starter and linked to the bible passage.

### A brother Like That

Paul received an automobile from his brother as a Christmas present. On Christmas Eve when Paul came out of his office, a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. "Is this your car, Mister?" he asked. Paul nodded. "My brother gave it to me for Christmas." The boy was astounded. "You mean your brother gave it to you and it didn't cost you nothing? Boy, I wish ..." He hesitated. Of course Paul knew what he was going to wish for. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the lad said jarred Paul all the way down to his heels. "I wish," the boy went on, "that I could be a brother like that." Paul looked at the boy in astonishment then impulsively he added, "Would you like to take a ride in my automobile?"

After a short ride, the boy turned and with his eyes aglow, said, "Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?" Paul smiled, thought he knew that the lad wanted to show his neighbors that he could ride home in a big automobile. But Paul was wrong again. "Will you stop where those two steps are?" the boy asked. He ran up the steps. Then in a little while Paul heard him coming back, but he was not coming fast. He was carrying his little crippled brother. He sat him down on the bottom step, then sort of squeezed up against him and pointed to the car.

"There she is, Buddy, just like I told you upstairs. His brother gave it to him for Christmas and it didn't cost him a cent. And some day I'm gonna give you one just like it ... then you can see for yourself all the pretty things in the Christmas windows that I've been trying to tell you about."

Paul got out and lifted the lad to the front seat of his car. The shining-eyed older brother climbed in beside him and the three of them began a memorable holiday ride. That Christmas Eve, Paul learned what Jesus meant when he said: "It is more blessed to give..."

### Fool's gold?

Martin Frobisher was an Elizabethan explorer who set out to discover the North West passage for Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> or die trying. In 1576 he set sail, landing at what is now called Frobisher Bay which he at first believed to be the North West passage. Frobisher brought back home a lump of black ore with something glistening in it, which was pronounced to be gold.

Frobisher set off again, in 1577 and again in 1578 with royal and financial backing excited by reports of gold. The purpose was indicated by a crew which included many Cornish tin miners and heavy digging equipment! Frobisher shipped back some 200 tons of this ore back to Britain and built special refinery to extract the

gold. However, as the Encyclopaedia Britannica puts it, "Frobisher's single-minded pursuit of mineral treasure limited the exploratory value of his voyages, and, when the ores he brought back from his third voyage proved to contain neither silver nor gold, his financing collapsed, and he was forced to seek other employment".

What to do with these tons of this ore with traces of iron pyrites? It was used for metalling some of the roadways of London, the origin, apparently, of the saying that the streets of London are paved with gold. .

Frobisher subsequently sailed with Drake, fought the Spanish Armada and died of a gunshot wound in 1594.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> [www.givinginrace.org/seasons-leaflet](http://www.givinginrace.org/seasons-leaflet)

<sup>2</sup> [www.givinginrace.org/seasons-giant](http://www.givinginrace.org/seasons-giant)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.givinginrace.org/Preach-Luke!>