Stowe Church HARVEST FESTIVAL 2024

Luke 12: 13-21

Our reading from Luke comes within a block of teaching, when Jesus warns and encourages a large crowd to trust and put their hope in God, and to prioritise Him.

And Jesus is asked to settle a dispute between brothers who are arguing over their inheritance. It was quite common at that time for people to bring their problems and arguments to rabis and teachers, but Jesus doesn’t want to get involved in their dispute. Instead he uses it as an opportunity to teach people with a parable about the importance we place on material possessions and wealth. Jesus actually talks first to those who have plenty and then secondly to those who have less.

Our parable reading today is Jesus’ message to those who have plenty, and it is relevant to us because Britain is the 5th or 6th  richest country in the world. That doesn’t mean that everyone in Britain is rich – many are struggling and need our support – but as a country we are rich, and our harvest festival donations show the abundance of our land AND the generosity of the congregation here at Stowe.

The parable of the rich fool is all about a man who doesn’t see beyond himself. He asks what shall **I** do? And he talks to himself. He is fortunate, his land is producing an abundant harvest, much more than he needs. But he doesn’t consider sharing it or helping those whose harvest is not as abundant. Instead he decides to build a bigger barn to store up his abundant harvest for himself. He has all that he needs and then a lot more, but it doesn’t seem to cross his mind that he could help others or share, the harvest is his and his alone.

So he plans to build a bigger barn. Store up his riches and then “take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (vs 19) He’s saying in effect ‘im alright Jack’ and not thinking of others.

In Barclay’s commentary he writes that the evangelist John Wesley initially had an income of £30 a year (how the value of money has changed!) He needed £28 to live and gave the remaining £2 away to help others. But when he grew older and his income became £120 a year, he still lived on £28 and gave the remaining £92 away to help others. The way Wesley saw money is the very opposite of the rich man in our parable.

But in our parable the rich fool stores up his money, with no thought of others and seemingly with no thought except for this earthly life. He put value into earthly things and did not consider anything else. And as we heard, that very night the man dies and has nothing to help him enter the next life. He may have been earthly rich but he is not rich before God.

I think it is important to stress here that if he had shared his abundance the rich fool would not have earnt himself a place in heaven. We are not saved by good deeds but by grace through faith in Jesus. It is faith not deeds that brings salvation. The point of this parable is that the man had earthly values and did not live as God wanted him too. He does not pray and ask God what he should do with his abundant harvest, he is focused only on earthly things. And we need to focus on eternal things, on God and his plan for us and the salvation he offers us through Jesus death and resurrection. We need to follow, trust and hope in Jesus as ‘the way, the truth and the life’ And we should focus on eternal things not solely as a way to prepare for death but as a way to live! To live joyful, secure and peaceful lives – to live life to the full as God intended.

Just after this parable, if we carry on reading Luke 12, Jesus goes on to say ‘seek ye first the kingdom of God’ – our priority should be to live in God’s kingdom here on earth, obeying God, listening to him and trusting him with our lives and our decisions. And Jesus is very clear that he wants us to share our faith with those who are not fortunate enough to Have Jesus in their lives….yet.

Today we appreciate and give thanks for our harvest , we rightly celebrate our farmers and all who work to enable us to have food and water, thanking God that his world, his creation provides us with everything we need and asking his guidance for our lives and community, as we focus on him and what he wants for our lives.