

## Sermon for 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Text: Luke 18:18-30 - The Rich Ruler**

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

18 A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

19 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother.’[”

21 “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!

25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

26 Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

27 Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

28 Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”

29 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Good morning!

I am David, Bishop of Basingstoke. I have been a Church minister for over 30 years, working in that time in two dioceses – Sheffield and Winchester. As a Christian I think I have been forged in South Yorkshire and formed in Hampshire, in the gracious company of many fellow travellers. Together we have prayed, wept and laughed and sought to follow Jesus in our workplaces, our communities and our households.

We will have found ourselves admirers of Jesus, comforted in times of difficulty, challenged in times of complacency. Generous June is a collaboration between Sheffield and Winchester dioceses. For a whole month you have the chance to spend time reading Luke’s Gospel and allowing the person, teaching, and actions of Jesus to catch your imagination afresh. Listen to the daily podcasts as well as the

Sunday sermons – the voices of young and old, of men and women from Hampshire and South Yorkshire – allow Jesus to shape you, your faith and your commitment to the community of those who follow Jesus.

We have unashamedly interpreted Luke's Gospel through the lens of generosity. Although this series was planned some time ago, it has all been written during the "lock down" associated with Covid-19. Generosity has been one of the defining points of the way people have responded to this global co-vid crisis. Generosity that has involved key workers having to adapt their working practices to mitigate the risks; care staff and health service staff having to work in high risk environments and many of us having to become more attentive to those who live closest to us..

Generosity can be so deep that it is profoundly pervasive in all of our lives, so that money is only a part of generosity – how we share our time, our space, our gifts, our friendship is all part of a transforming generosity.

In this morning's reading we encounter a young man who is curious and intrigued by Jesus. He is devout and very religious. I suspect that he has spent time in the crowds that gathered around Jesus and wants to know more. The three years of Jesus time as a public figure are mostly focussed around his local area. People came in their thousands to see him, to hear him and to watch what he did. Jesus teaches about how the penitent enter the Kingdom of God, about humility and gratitude and then the extraordinary challenge of entering God's Kingdom and sharing in the life of the age to come.

The geography changes – instead of the rolling Galilean hills – the natural places where people can sit and listen, the houses that offered hospitality, the Synagogues where Jesus preached, he is now on the road to Jerusalem. The crowds have vanished – it is becoming a more hostile environment – little wonder that his followers are asking questions and wondering where it is all going.

The man, described as a rich ruler, appears confident, is well organised and looks Jesus in the face, calls him good, but is going to turn away sad. The young man's confidence is rooted in his own abilities, including his money. Jesus offers something very different – would he accept Gods kingdom, like a child with a

humble trust that allows God to be God or was he about to discover that his confidence lay in his possessions?

When you give away the things, you hold dear, be it time, friendship, attention, service or money, you discover that the person who benefits most is the giver – but that involves a new trust in God. A trust that true wealth is found in the heavenly dimension. Whenever a Christian community starts living like this there is a growth of selfless and trusting common life, church members and the world around glimpse what God's new world is like and learn to live that way more and more.

I wonder what would have happened to that young man if he had taken Jesus challenge and given away all his money and followed Jesus? He would have continued the journey for the rest of the week, seen Jesus hailed as a King and then a few days later witness the crowd call for Him to be crucified. He would have seen soldiers come to the garden to arrest Jesus, and in that moment, Jesus healed the ear of one of those arresting Him. As they pounded nails into Jesus hands, he would have heard Jesus say: "Father forgive them". He would have seen that Jesus came not to bring judgement but to subject himself to judgement, all that we might instead be those who receive not judgement but God's love.

If we take that journey and hear God, we will discover that he gives himself to us for us to receive Him! As he is emptied, he experiences abandonment and a cosmic, infinite agony but you and I get embraced and loved, we get the Holy Spirit of love.

This is the lesson the rich ruler did not get the chance to learn. He was being invited into the company of the one who would give himself utterly for you. He, Jesus is one who heals, who fills you with his love and utterly frees us. There is nothing more deadly than relying on our own abilities and our own possessions, of spending a whole life achieving our own worth, when Jesus offers it to us – out of his infinite generosity towards us. That freedom enables us to give ourselves to Him and to give ourselves to other people.

Discipleship means putting Jesus ahead of your family, ahead of your money, ahead of your career – it is a radical call, but it is also a gentle call, for he is a wise and gentle counsellor.

The rich ruler went away sad. Can I urge you to be open to Jesus call to you today? After the Resurrection of Jesus many thousands decided to call him their King. They began to gather, teaching and encouraging, worshipping and praising, baptising and proclaiming God's grace. Many joined that new gathering of Jesus-followers every day and we are told, almost as a throw-away remark "nobody in that region was in need" – these people shared their lives, their food, their time and their prayers. I hope through this passage and over the last few days you have become compelled afresh at the vision of a authentic generosity. When our giving of money comes from that basis the Church will find its needs are met. The next step is deeply personal – ask the Lord to give you a fresh vision of his generosity for you. Would you in the light of that be prepared to prayerfully review your own financial giving. I have huge respect for those who quietly give wherever they are prompted to give.

Can we join together in offering a tangible generous commitment to the local church and support it in its serving of our communities?

Where do we start?

Could I ask you to consider giving a significant one-off gift to your own local church? And secondly, as part of a commitment to generosity, would you review your regular giving to the Church, and consider increasing your giving, or if you don't give regularly to the Church, consider starting?

It is imperative at this time that we are sensitive to individual financial situations, so please, if your financial circumstances have changed significantly in the last weeks and months, it may be that through your prayerful giving review, you rightfully decide to reduce your giving to the church at this time.

In Sheffield and in Winchester it has been the experience of radical generosity that has most significantly shaped my understanding of God's love and of prayers that are answered beyond our imagining!

Amen