

Harvest Festival Talk



Introduction

- This talk is provided in bullet point form - please feel free to adapt it as you wish.
- Some facts, figures and case studies from the Trussell Trust are provided. More information may be accessed at trusselltrust.org
- This talk is based on the Gospel passage suggested for use in this service, Luke 12.13-21. We have used the NRSV but feel free to use whichever version you prefer:

13 Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' 14 But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' 15 And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' 16 Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 18 Then he said, "I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.' (NRSV)

Points for your talk

- This is a parable, a story told by Jesus to illustrate a point.
- It is worth noting the context in which Jesus tells the parable. He has just asked by someone to intervene in a dispute about a will - two siblings are quarrelling about an inheritance - sadly, an all-too-common scenario. But instead of responding with advice, Jesus tells his questioner to not let his or her actions be guided by greed (v.15). He then goes to tell the story that is the main focus of our talk today.
- The story starts with a bountiful harvest. The weather conditions had obviously been right, the crops had been strong, there had been no devouring pests and, we are told in v.16, 'the land produced abundantly'.
- We are told that the farmer was already rich (v.16), but his first response isn't 'Do I really need to keep all this food for myself? Can I share some of it with others?' Instead, he starts to fret about storage space. He doesn't have barns big enough for this huge crop. So his thoughts turn to ripping down his existing barns and building even larger ones.

- Some might say that he was just being a wise steward by carefully storing away his crop to last out the lean times. We might want to wonder what we would have done in the same situation.
- The rich farmer seems very pleased with his plan (v.19) - the abundant harvest will see him through for a good few years and he won't need to worry about working. He seems to be really looking forward to relaxing, eating, drinking and being merry.
- Perhaps this sounds like an attractive proposition to many of us? Not having to work for our daily bread! Surely this man has won the lottery! He can put his feet up, watch Netflix all day and drive around in a fast car if he so wishes.
- But this is a parable, a story intended to illustrate a point. We remember the words of Jesus back in verse 15: 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.' This story has a sting in the tail and it comes in a dramatic way in verse 20 - God intervenes and tells the man that that very night he is going to die and there will be no need for all those stored goods.
- Then comes the moral of the story, the punchline as it were, in v.21: 'So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'
- As is common with parables told by Jesus, we have to reflect on how all this applies to us today. We might be feeling quite smug as we hear all this - we might think we are nothing like the rich farmer. And I'm sure many of us are more generous than him - we share our resources - we may give to charity or volunteer at our local food bank, we do our bit to support those in need. (And if we don't and we're already feeling challenged by this story, there will be opportunities in this service to think more about our personal response).
- But what if we saw it a different way? Perhaps this parable is actually about our dependence on God. Our life itself, all that we have, all our worldly goods, ultimately come from God - as the Psalm we heard earlier puts it: 'The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.' (Psalm 67.6) In the ancient world, and even more recently in rural communities, people prayed to God for a good harvest and thanked him when it was all brought in safely - as the words of one of the traditional Harvest hymns put it: 'Come, ye thankful people, come/Raise the song of harvest home;/all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin./God our maker doth provide/for our wants to be supplied.'
- If we live in an urban area, it might be harder for us to be aware of the changing seasons and the precarious nature of growing food - although recent coverage of the impact of climate change on food production may have reminded us just how fragile our eco-system can be and how easily harvests can fail, causing shortages and even famines in parts of the world.
- This parable reminds us that it doesn't matter how much we store up for ourselves on earth - we can't take any of it with us. And as Jesus says in verse 15, our lives, our value as human beings, aren't determined by how much we have or own - or they shouldn't be if we are living as faithful followers of Christ.
- The parable also reminds us that we are to share what we have with others who don't have as much. We are not to 'store up treasures' for ourselves without a

thought for others, especially those who have less than us. This what 'being rich towards God' means (v.21).

- Many are struggling financially at the moment, particularly given the cost of living crisis. The Trussell Trust recently reported a 50% increase in the demand for emergency food parcels, compared to pre-pandemic levels, and a 29% increase since 2021. In April and May of this year, they reported giving out 420,000 emergency food parcels, that's one every 13 seconds. Many people are asking for cold food, as they can't afford to heat their meals. We also know that parents are skipping meals in order to feed their children. As one person put it who had no option but to use a food bank, 'I do skip meals. The kids don't, but I do. I can go three days without eating. When I first started doing it, it was like, oh my goodness, I feel ill. Now I'm used to it.'
- Yet, as need has increased, unfortunately donations to food banks have decreased which is leaving food banks in the Trussell Trust network stretched and exhausted.
- Shortly, we'll have the opportunity to bring up our donations, whether food or financial, to help food banks to keep supporting people in their communities, especially as winter, and increased fuel bills, approach. All donations are massively appreciated..
- But we're also aware that this is a matter of social justice. Being 'rich towards God' means having values and taking action that align with God's purposes for the world. God loves and values each individual and it is surely not right that in a wealthy, developed country like our own (the 5th wealthiest in the world according to some lists) there are people in our communities who are pushed to the doors of food banks to feed themselves and their children. The Trussell Trust exists to give immediate support where it is needed but also to campaign for a better future, where foodbanks are no longer needed.
- At the end of the service we'll have the opportunity to think about what more we might do to make positive changes in our society - whether that's through committing to giving a regular gift to the Trussell Trust, giving more of your time by volunteering at a food bank or writing to your MP about the situation.
- So, this Harvest, while being thankful for all we have, let's also commit to 'being rich towards God' in prayer, in word and in deed.
- Let's close with a time of reflection and a prayer:

Loving God, thank you for all that you give us -

for your generous provision of food, shelter and all that we need in our daily life.

We're sorry for the times when we take this for granted.

Open our eyes to the need around us.

Help us not to build bigger barns to store up treasures for ourselves but to be generous givers.

May we stand alongside people who are struggling, including people who do not have enough income to afford the essentials, like food, that we all need to get by.

Inspire us to fight for justice for all - so that no one faces hunger and food banks are no longer needed.

We ask all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

If you have found this resource helpful and want to receive updates from our Church Engagement team including new resources to help you and your church join the fight against hunger then sign up here:

www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/church-support/join/

