

Sermon June 1st - Money

▶ Acts 16.16–34

▶ John 17.20–26

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I want to talk about Money today.

Don't groan!

So what you're expecting me to say, probably, is that it costs £80,000 a year to run Sts James.

vicar, children's worker, administrator, insurance, heating, lighting, churchyard, maintenance of a Grade 2 listed building and more.

None of this comes from central Church of England funds or the Government.

Each parish has to pay its own way.

In Alderholt that means roughly £10 a week for each person in church.

So if you're not giving that, then chances are the person in the pew next to you is paying more than that to pay your share, and if you're not giving that - that may be the reason we are over £1000 short every month. Coming from our reserves, which are at about £15k. So you can tell how long we've got left.

That's what your expecting me to say, that's what normal, boring, churches would do. Maybe its what i should do.

But there's so much more to say about money. Jesus talked about money more than any other subject, except maybe the kingdom of god - depends how you count the verses.

Why?

Because money is really important to you, to me, to the council, the country, the world.

So we should think about it more.

What about this woman, this fortune teller - who had some real gift - from some unknown bad / evil spirit. We don't know if she had any choice in all this, or how she felt about it - she was just another woman exploited for money in some ways. And her owners - slave culture - they were making a mint.

And then she is healed, freed from this demon, this thing. And her owners are very cross.

You see religion has always been associated with money.

Humans want God - we have a 'god shaped hole - as st Augustine said -

So we crave this connection.

The largest sector of the book market : - religious, spiritual, self help books - we want to know, we want to be better - help us!!

We buy any book that promises - heaven in 4 easy steps.

Religion is big business.

Always was - the Pharaohs - they are Gods, look at their pyramids.

Ephesus - you've heard of the letter to the Ephesians - well they were the centre of the worship of Artemis - people come from all over the world to worship, to buy little statues - idols. And didn't St Paul get in trouble when he told them there was a god who was everywhere - not just in Ephesus! And you didn't an idol to worship him! There was a riot, they stoned him - not because they cared one way or another about Jesus! But because their money was threatened!

Religion and Money - hand in hand.

We've just had a new pope - he cares about the poor, the commentators said. And a little further down - but what about all the wealth of the Catholic church - all those billions of dollars, all that gold!!

You see, its easy to call the religious people hypocrites - they've got money, the church has money, they should give it away, if they care about the poor.

And they won't criticise, or notice the pay of politicians, Gary Linaker or Alex Jones from the One show - because they're not setting out to live in a good way, or a virtuous way.

But religious people are supposed to be poor. That Cardinal in Germany who had a sports car! There's an archdeacon in the next county who has a sports car too!

What a funny world -

Its ok for me to be in my rich house, and my holidays and not worry about the poor or helping others -

Because I can leave that up to you - the religious lot.

You care - so give away your money, Not mine.

And this is where we get it all wrong. We don't ask the right questions, so we don't get the right answers.

The question is not - will you give your money to help the poor, or keep the church going.

Its - what is your money for? Why do you spend it on the things you spend it on?

Why would you give it to the poor, or the church?

Because God is not short of money!!

I'll say it again.

God is not short of money.

We're not having a whip round for him!! Do you see?

We get caught up in a human perspective - heres a need, poor people, a church roof, whatever.

And here's some money - so problem solved!

But Jesus said an interesting and often forgotten thing -

"the poor you will always have with you."

This is not a problem we can fix. The poor are not a problem to be fixed.

Jesus saw only people -
People who were hurting and in need
People who were generous and open hearted
People who were scared and frightened, and clung to their money like they clung to their comfort blankets or their mums skirts, or behind “my dad’s bigger than your dad”

The reason christians give money - is partly to make a difference
But mostly because its good for our soul.

Bill Gates, the computer guy, was for a long time teh richest person on the planet, and was the youngest person to become a billionaire at the age of 31 (there are people younger than him now). 25 years ago, he set up his foundation to give away his money. So far its given over £100 billion dollars away, and teh plan is to spend £200 billion in the next 20 - and spend it all.

Its not as difficult as it seems - the ex-wife of Jeff Bezos, the Amazon founder, has managed to give away her half of the divorce settlement - £190 billion dollars - in just a few years!

Why do these really rich people do it - yes, it makes a difference - Bill Gates has stopped more pregnancy and maternity deaths than another else.

But they also recognise its good for your soul.

Giving away money reminds us that....

Money is not the measure of how valuable a person is!

I sit round a governors meeting at school. I know I'm' paid the least per hour, there is a retired person (still gets more than me), a teaching assistant, a teacher and a head teacher, and a couple of guys who work in big firms. Everybody is valued and important. Teh guys who tap at the keyboard, wear suits and have intercontinental zoom meetings are not better, or more skilled or more intelligent, or kinder, or anything compared to the teachers, the TA's, the retired person and me.

Money is not the value of people - but so so much of what we see and read and hear, tell us that it is. Not to God. And we need to be reminded of that.

We are dependent on God.

One of the things about money is that it can buy you privileged. Skip the NHS queues. It can insulate you from uncomfortable things - I don't have to travel on smelly, slow, not there public transport - I have a car. So we can think, if we have money, we are in control of our destiny, I'm safe, I've got enough put away.

But you don't! You don't know what's going to happen - all of it might come crashing down. Being rich doesn't stop horrible things happening, it just makes it feel even worse! We have to let go, and trust God. You don't put the sun in teh sky every day! God gives us air to breathe, plants grow and give us food. You have life - that you didn't pay for. When we give money away, it pushes us to the place of letting go, and trusting God.

Thirdly, finally - I could talk about money all day - but ..

Giving makes us care, because you're invested.

When you give money to repair the roof - you go - well has it been done yet?

When people gave money to Live Aid - showing my age - they wanted to know - is it going to the right people Bob?

When we pay our taxes - we're like - government - spend it on this, or that.

When you give money to a charity or church or individual - you say - there's a connection now.

So giving is not about keeping the church going, or eradicating poverty.

It's actually about what it does to us.

That's why Jesus says to the rich young man - go and sell your possessions and follow me

The man was tied, comfortable.

Or Zaccheus gives back money to those he's defrauded - cancelling the debt he owed them.

Or Jesus says it's more blessed to give, than to receive..

Give to everyone who asks.

Freely you have received, freely give...

Do you notice, it's not about the difference their money will make out there.

It's what's going on in here.

So - think - how much do I give away - and who to?

Not boomerang giving - the aid we used to give to poor countries to get something back.

Not investment giving - give it to our kids to escape tax and so they'll look after us.

But giving - to church, to charities..

Decide on a sum, and set it aside, or do a standing order.

The church of England - asset rich, cash poor. We own this building and this churchyard, would cost us a million or 2 to replace - but we can't sell it, we can't use it for anything other than this!

So we need £10 a week per person. Standing order are easy Gift aid increased it by 25%. It's all confidential and the only person that knows is the Treasurer, I don't know, I don't want to know.

And I was at meeting at Wimborne Minister the other day, and Andrew, the vicar, said - this place only keeps going because of legacies. People gave generously in their wills decades and decades ago, and that's what keeps the lights on. So everything I've said about giving, is true about your will as well.

Money - not the root of all evil - go and look up what the verse actually says.

But it is a spiritual tool - to help you get you get closer to God.