

We all know 'It's the economy, stupid', but the debates this week for a new leader of the Conservative Party have focussed almost exclusively upon tax cuts or tax increases. We've heard almost nothing of climate change, education, the NHS, the true cost of war and peace or the unfolding consequences of Brexit.

Today the Gospel, seems indeed to echo that same theme- with wealth being a major stumbling block. Wealth is a subject we know quite a lot about in Chelsea, where amidst so much wealth our Foodbank and Glass Door are being used by growing numbers of people.

Indeed, doom and gloom, seems to pervade all today's readings. In church speak: vanity, sin, delusion, avarice- we've got them all in spades today. But what do we do with them? Keep quiet, hope they'll go away, or do we beat our breasts and do a John the Baptist, run to the wilderness and eat locusts and wild honey?

The readings from scripture today do call us to focus on a really important part of our lives- it's one I earnestly hope that the Lambeth Conference is considering appropriately too and not just getting hung up on sex again. Indeed, read the bible and there is infinitely more said about money than sex. But in both cases it is how we use these gifts that matters.

In the passage we heard Jesus uses a word which has a wide range of meanings, so it's hard to know quite how to understand it (for those who like to know it is πλεονεξία). What is absolutely clear is that it wealth isn't being condemned, but our attitude to it and of it. Wealth, in the scriptures is largely morally neutral, simply because all things- including wealth- are already God's, part of the things of God's creating, and as we say 'All things come from you and of your own do we give you'. What is absolutely never morally neutral is what we choose to do with that wealth. So this word used by Jesus is about what we do with our resources- money, land, intelligence, creativity, whatever it may be, he says 'avoid all greed, rapaciousness, disregarding of others, jealousy- or that word we

only hear in church, covetousness, . It's not wealth that is a vice, but what we do with it. And the problem with this greed, self-regard, rapaciousness, is that it is both corrosive and insatiable. The desire to have more is almost impossible to stop- we want bigger, better, newer, faster, greener and it eats away both at us and our relations with others. What matters about my bonus, my dividends, my salary rise, my state pension increase, is what I'm going to do with it. And what is true for the individual is equally true for our parish, what are we doing with our income and our reserves, and its true for our nation. In individual life, in parish life as a nation if money talks- what is our wealth saying?

St Paul, writing to the christian community in Colossae, another wealthy place beginning with the

letter C, makes exactly the same point, that this greed, is in fact idolatry- and idolatry, is whatever gives you security.....as Jesus said, wherever your treasure is there will your heart be also. Idolatry is – knowingly or unknowingly-whatever we treat as giving us security other than God, in whom alone, we find security and meaning and purpose. Placing our trust, our security in anything else, is futile- after all, whatever the size of your barn or shed or bank account, tonight may well be the night it ceases to be of any value to you at all.

So where do we put our trust? There's a certain irony, of course , in the strapline on US Dollars, 'In God we trust'-yes, but we prefer cash. For likewise the warning given to the property developer in today's Gospel equally meets its antithesis- he

listens but doesn't want to hear, and it is a warning amplified in the Old Testament reading too. The Book of Ecclesiastes is an anonymous text, and it bewails the human predicament, pleading, everything is vanity, every human endeavour which is not rooted in love of God and neighbour, is but running after the wind.

Maybe this coming month of August, when we may have a bit more time to consider our situation, whether that's on a less crowded tube, on a holiday beach, without the mad rush of getting the children to school on time or sitting in St Luke's Gardens in the sunshine- maybe this is a good time to ask this most basic question, which Jesus mirrors back to his questioner- what am I doing with what God has given me?

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