One of my first funeral visits I had when I arrived here was to a brother and sister who had sadly lost their mother, there father had passed away a couple of years earlier. It was an evening meeting at the mother’s house. The daughter had lived with mum and the brother was married living in his own house.

When I arrived you could tell there was some tension, whatever the daughter said the brother disagreed with and vis versa. To cut a long story short I had to separate them into 2 rooms and discuss funeral arrangements separately. The reason for this tension was the will and who was getting what.

Before the will they had been a close loving family.

A lot if family upsets happen because of money, a lot of PCC disagreements happen because of money.

I think it’s because in church we don’t talk about money enough.

So here we are this morning with the discomfort of the parable from Jesus today.  At first glance, this is a story about smart financial investments.  A man has a bumper crop – the land produces so abundantly he cannot fit the excess crops into his current barns.  Knowing that the harvest can be feast or famine and we are certainly hearing this in today’s news with all the dry weather we are having. He may well have taken some notes from his ancestor Joseph who prevented a seven-year famine by stockpiling during a seven-year boom, the man decides he will just have to build a bigger barn to hold all the extra crops.

To be honest with you, from a man who is trying to sort out my pensions and future as I approach 60, his actions do not sound that far off from what any pension adviser might tell us to do – store the excess away so that when a rainy day comes, or even when retirement comes, we can still “eat, drink, and be merry.”  All in all, his logic sounds pretty spot-on to me.

But here’s the bummer. The day the newly enlarged barn is finished is the same day that the man will die.  All those plans, hopes, and dreams for a secure retirement are gone.  He never gets to enjoy the fruits of his labour.  He never gets to retire in comfort.  He never gets to eat, drink, and be merry.

Our immediate reaction to this tragedy might be to proclaim how life or God is not fair.  But into our disappointment, Jesus says, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

In these last words from Jesus, Jesus takes the wind out of our sails.  Jesus reminds us that being a good steward of our resources means lots of things:  being smart with our money, saving for times of famine, giving to the church, and caring for our neighbour.  But most importantly, being a good steward of our resources is not just about sound financial practices.

Being a good steward of our resources is also managing our relationship with our money – and more specifically, managing our relationship with God in relation to our money.

Now some of you may be thinking, “Here he goes.  He’s going to tell me how I need to give more money to the church to right my relationship with God.”

No need to get too anxious today.

I don’t think Jesus is looking for a specific action today – as if to say, “Do not be like the man with the barns.  Give your full ten percent to the church and all will be well.”  No, what Jesus is trying to do is help us see that our relationship with money matters.  Unlike most churches and church leaders, Jesus never shies away from talking about money.  He is constantly warning us about the potential of riches to corrupt our relationship with God.

So, the answer to what the rich man should do may not be a clear-cut formula, but we get some obvious clues about what Jesus means about being rich toward God.

Going back to the story is particularly helpful.  The most obvious thing that we see happening in the parable is that the wealthy man has become completely self-absorbed.

Listen again to the words of the parable, “And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 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. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”  The list is long:  What should I do?  My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul.

All the words of the wealthy man are self-referential. Nowhere does he talk to God.  Nowhere does he talk to his family or a trusted friend.

Nowhere does he consult his property manager, or the local priest.  He never praises God for the abundance.  He never acknowledges that the land has provided.  He never even considers sharing his abundance.

He is self-interested, self-protecting, and self-centred.

All of that focus on the self comes from a relationship with money and with God that is out of balance.

So how do we avoid the slippery slope that leads to self-centeredness either as an individual or a church and greed, luring us to constantly redefine how much is “enough”?

What exactly is being rich toward God?

Jesus tells us the answer to our quandary throughout Luke’s gospel.  As one scholar explains, “Being rich toward God entails using one’s resources for the benefit of one’s neighbour in need, as the Samaritan did (10:25-37).  Being rich toward God includes intentionally listening to Jesus’ word, as Mary did (10:38-42).

Being rich toward God consists of prayerfully trusting that God will provide for the needs of life (11:1-13, 12:22-31).  Being rich toward God involves selling possessions and giving alms as a means of establishing a lasting treasure in heaven (12:32-34).”  In other words, “Life and possessions are a gift of God to be used to advance God’s agenda of care and compassion, precisely for those who lack resources to provide for themselves.”

People are always asking me questions about what they’re supposed to do. Like the man interrupting Jesus they want to know how to handle a specific situation according to what it means to live as a Christian. To be authentically Christian the question can no longer be, “What should I do?” but instead, “who am I to be?”

When we ask ourselves who we are to be, we can live our lives in such a way that we will already know the answer to the former question. We are to be disciples of Jesus Christ. We are to be a people of gifts. We may complain about one another to one another, like the interrupting man does, but this kind of bickering will never get through to God. Before God we are confessors not complainers. God is the center of the story, not us. All of the talk in the story about the farmer has been a monologue.

He talks to himself, plans for himself, celebrates himself. All these things in my life, I accomplished them, I’ve earned this; I deserve this. It is only when God finally intrudes in the story that we get a glimpse of the truth: “You fool!”

We are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, intent on doing the will of God in the world so that his kingdom can reign abundantly, so that God can continually reconcile us to himself, to one another, and to his creation, so that we can be the body of Christ for the world redeemed by his blood.

If we are going to follow Jesus, to avoid a life of self-centeredness, and claim a life of being rich toward God, we are going to need each other.

If we are to be the benefice God wants us to be, this is the important work Jesus invites us into today.  My guess is that building up a community of support that is rich toward God will create much more opportunities to eat, drink, and be merry, than any bigger barn could ever give us.  Amen.