**Sermon for 7th June 2020**

**Text: Luke 12:13-21 - The Rich Fool**

Friends, I have been pondering a phrase which is sometimes attributed to Winston Churchill though, I couldn't be sure he ever actually said it. The phrases is “Never waste a good crisis!” The Coronavirus has been a devastating crisis worldwide and I'm certainly not meaning to make light of it. As I record this video, more than 4 million people have been infected worldwide and almost 300,000 people have died. In both cases, of course, the number only refers to those who've been medically tested, making the two totals much higher. But the distressing dilemma facing politicians around the world has been to balance the medical cost against the economic cost, as almost every nation has had to shut down and locked down for weeks so jobs and businesses have been lost. unemployment has shot up, and the world faces a recession as severe as anything in my lifetime. So no I'm not making light of it. And yes, I do hope we won't waste the crisis. You see, at least for those of us in the West, this generation has been able to indulge a fantasy to which human beings in every time and place have been prone, which is to suppose that our standard of living is key to our quality of life, that wealthy people are more fulfilled people, and that the price of something is a good indication of its actual value.

My hope is that the Coronavirus crisis of 2020 will prove in time to expose this empty materialist, consumerist vision of human happiness and will have given both individuals and societies a fresh opportunity to take stock of what we really want from life. Because the idea that riches are the key to fullness of life is sheer folly, at least according to Jesus. But on the other hand, living generously and sitting light to the money we have, that's the power to contentment. For the next few minutes, I want to explore with you the passage from the Gospel of Luke chapter 12, which forms the basis for this sermon, the parable of the rich fool. I want to look forward on to look first at what prompted Jesus to tell the parable that's verses 13 to 15 in 12, then I'll look at the parable itself. That's verses 16 to 20. And last, I want to explore the warning Jesus gave In conclusion, in verse 21.

First of all, the verses which introduce a parable, it's always worth stopping to look at what prompted Jesus to tell a particular parable. On this occasion, it was property dispute in which he was asked to intervene. At first sight. It looks as if Jesus was faced with a cry for justice. Rabbi shouted “Someone in the crowd, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Apparently he gave Jesus cause for concern, because at once he turns to the crowd and warns them be on guard against all kinds of greed. A person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions. All the sayings of Jesus, this is surely among those which speak most directly to the 21st century in Britain, and at this time of crisis, right around the world. It is so relevant, it could almost have been calling for our times how we need to hear Jesus remind us that life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions, how we need to help one another to hold on to this truth. Because so many of the messages we receive every day, tell us the exact opposite. So let's not waste a good crisis.

I do pray that the Coronavirus will be like a bucket of cold water thrown over a complacent Western 21st century humanity beguiled for so long by consumerism and materialism. Please go on let these weeks of lockdown enable us to recover a true sense of what really matters to us. Jesus said, a person's life is not measured by the things they own. The size of your bank balance is not a measure of your greatness as a human being a bigger income or a savings account does not make you a bigger person. A faster car, a smarter gadget, a fancier fashion label does not make you a better person, still less a happier one. Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions.

Then in verses 16 to 20, Jesus went on to tell this parable then was a man he said who was rich already, but in a year of plenty, he hit a snag. His barns were not big enough to store the bumper crop. So he took counsel with himself and decided to pull down his existing barns and build bigger ones. Now, at one level, there's nothing wrong with that. It's good sense to plan for growth when business is booming. Just as many are discovering, it's vital to get back when times are hard. But in this case, the plan is not good sense. It's plain folly. Why? Well, the man is a fool First of all, because he is indulging his selfishness. Did you notice that in verse 17, when the man consults, he consults only with himself. In verse 19, when he speaks, he speaks to himself. And when he does think and speak all he can think and speak about is himself in verses 17 and 18. It's my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods. This man may live like a king, but his kingdom is tiny. It's bounded to the north and the south and the east and the west by himself. He hasn't a thought for anyone else. And that is the trouble with wealth. The more you have, the more isolated you become. The bigger your house. The bigger the distance between you and your neighbour, the more likely you are to think you don't need anyone else. Indulge that kind of selfish self-sufficiency and you're a fool says Jesus. But the man is a fool. Secondly, because he thinks that material things are the best that this life has to offer. In verse 19, he pledges to tell himself you have good plenty of good things laid up for many years take life easy, eat, drink and be married. That's the materialist, consumerist vision, isn't it? The Good Life The dream of plenty, with leisure to enjoy it, but it's a pleasure. In a solution, an abundance does not necessarily make life either easier or happier. It's true that there is great fun to be had in eating and drinking and making merry it’s something most of us should do more often, not less. Actually, I get the impression there's been quite a lot of dedicated and deliberate eating, drinking and merrymaking during the weeks of locked down, and in most cases, I reckon rightly so. But make those things the focus of your life, your life's goal, and you'll squeeze all the pleasure out of them. The man told himself if he only had bigger barns, now he would be content for years. But the scary truth about possessions is that if you seek contentment through them, you'll only find an inner restlessness gnawing away at you more and more strongly. Seek contentment in material things, and you're a fool says Jesus.

And the man is a fool. Thirdly, because he's closed his mind all togetherto God. He's giving no thought to alter his own accountability, when in verse 20 God says this very night, your life will be demanded of you. It's a reminder that even life itself is just unknown to us. It's not ours to keep, and there will be a reckoning for the use that we have made of it. You're certainly kidding yourself, if you depend on possessions for security. It's easy to forget this in ordinary times. But again, our recent experience is that even the rich are not beyond the reach of a virus. Of course, I don't deny that the poor have been far more vulnerable to this disease, as they are to every kind of ill health. But my point is, that the rich have not been able to buy immunity. Sometimes prosperity can lull us into a false sense of security, whereas the poorest in our world are in this danger of forgetting just how precarious life is. But the fact is, that out of every 10 people 10 will die. Put your trust in possessions to secure your future. And you're a fool. That kind of trust is to be placed in God, says Jesus. And that brings me to the very last verse, which having finished the parable Jesus delivers as a parting shot to the crowd. That rich man, he said, was a fool. And so it will be with you if you store up things for yourself, but I'm not rich towards God. So it will be with you. We are not to store up things for ourselves, no matter how little we may have, we will always have enough to be generous. And no matter how much we may have, we will always face the temptation to hoard things for ourselves.

So a crucial question for each one of us is perhaps this the material things we have our income, our possessions, our property, our savings, who do they benefit? Is it only ourselves or are those things at the service of God? You see, just as we are today and the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. You and I are called to be rich towards God. as disciples of Jesus, were called to prioritise heavenly riches over earthly ones and spiritual over material wealth. If most of us spent half as much time daydreaming about or hungering after, or working for and carefully stewarding our spiritual wealth, as we do our earthly material possessions, what find people we would be and what a wonderful world it would be. There is nothing for it, my friends, but to begin with the resources we have. The opposite of storing things up for ourselves, is simply to live generously and gratefully forgot. The rich fool was awful, because he thought his best chance of joy was in keeping his goods to himself. In fact, one of the world's best kept secrets is how much joy there is to be found in being generous.

In fact, only the quality of our generosity can provethat those of us who are wealthy people are not also foolish people. So I do wish you a generous June and please God let us not waste a good crisis.