

**Colossians 3. 1-11 and Luke 12. 13-21 Coventry Cathedral 3 August  
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According to new research into our viewing habits, You Tube is now second only to the BBC as the most watched platform in the UK. So, I'm not alone in spending time, that I'm never going to get back, watching everything from those very useful 'how to' videos to independent political commentators – with a good dose of van life vids thrown in for good measure - on my phone! One of my favourite You Tubers, or content creators as we are meant to call them these days, is a young American woman called Hannah Alonzo. She has run a series called Influencer Insanity where she critiques You Tube and Tik Tok content that flaunts ridiculous over consumption or totally unattainable lifestyles. I love that she is prepared to call out a world obsessed with accumulation. The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12 is disturbingly contemporary: a man tears down his barns to build bigger ones, congratulating himself on his security, only to hear God say, "You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you". Meanwhile, Colossians 3 calls us to a radical reorientation: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things". These texts confront us with a question: What if our understanding of abundance is killing us—and the planet?

This isn't just a spiritual problem; it's an ecological and economic one. A couple of years ago at Greenbelt I went to hear the economist Kate

Raworth, talk about her principle of Doughnut Economics, in which she argues that our growth-obsessed systems are violating our planet's boundaries while leaving billions in poverty. The rich fool's logic—store up, take more, build bigger—is the same logic driving climate breakdown and inequality. But Scripture offers a subversive alternative: a life stripped of excess, rooted in Christ, and oriented toward justice.

Paul's words are fierce in Colossians 3. In verse 5 he writes "Put to death therefore, whatever in you is earthly: ...(including) greed, which is idolatry" Greed isn't just a personal vice; it's false worship that conflates accumulation with security. The rich fool isn't merely selfish; he's theologically misguided. He believes his surplus secures his future, forgetting that life is, as James reminds us in his letter, "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes".

Paul's solution reflects our baptism: "you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self" (v. 9-10). This isn't a preacher's moralism; it's an invitation to re-creation. The "new self" is patterned after Christ, who, as the letter to the Philippians reminds us "emptied himself". To live in Christ is to reject the hoarding logic of the old self—a logic that commodifies people, land, and even time.

So here's the challenge for all of us. Where does our security truly lie? In barns (or in our own society, money, stuff, status etc) or in the God who calls us to be raised with Christ. In a world that consistently tells us that we need better clothes, whiter teeth, fancier cars, even a particular type of

travel mug, how do we resist, push back even, in a world where the poverty gap is once again widening across the globe and our planet is at risk of being crushed by the weight of our excess?

We are facing the real risk of ecological collapse by overshooting the Earth's boundaries. The constant drive for economic growth is perhaps seen most clearly in the fast fashion industry. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation approximately 92 million tons of textile waste is dumped each year, that's a bin lorry full of clothes either burned or sent to landfill every second! At the turn of the millennium an average item of clothing was worn over 30 times, today it's 7 to 10 times before it's disposed of. The companies responsible for this over production and consumption are raking in the money in whilst many of their workers are forced to endure dangerous working conditions and poverty wages. Child labour is still an issue in countries well known for their garment industries. Meanwhile, after the gains made in alleviating global poverty in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, human deprivation and suffering caused by an inequitable distribution of resources is once again on the rise. Just in the last five years the richest 1% of the world's population captured 63% of new global wealth, whilst the World Bank reports that 5 billion people are now poorer than they were before the pandemic.

The rich fool contributes to both ecological pressure and poverty. His hoarding puts pressure on the land with bigger barns requiring more resources and thus concentrating these assets in the hands of the wealthy

whilst ignoring the poor who could have been fed had the distribution been more fairly shared. Jesus' warning— "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (v. 15) is an indictment of an economic system that confuses growth with flourishing and thus encourages greed and deceit. Like the 7.6 trillion dollars that the Tax Justice Network estimate is hidden by the ultra-rich in tax havens, for example. That's more than the GDP of Germany!

So, what's the alternative? For us, as the community here at Coventry Cathedral, this is a salient question. When we pray our Litany of Reconciliation we ask for forgiveness for wanting to possess what is not our own, for the greed that lays waste the earth and our indifference to those in places of vulnerability. So perhaps we should pay some serious attention to Raworth's "doughnut" model that proposes an economy that avoids the two catastrophes of ecological collapse and human suffering and deprivation.

If you imagine a doughnut, the outer ring represents our planet's boundaries that we must keep within. Our economies need to adjust to protect our climate, oceans and ecosystems. The inner ring represents our social fabric and the minimum requirements for human well-being – food, water, housing, healthcare, education and a political voice etc. These are all worthy of investment that will benefit everyone. The dough between the two rings is the safe and just space for humanity to live.

Our politicians are obsessed with GDP. But GDP is a very poor measure of well-being. It does not measure the gap between the richest person in a society and the poorest. It's why Egypt is considered a middle-income country whilst most of its population live in abject poverty. It also encourages growth at the expense of the planet. It's why Donald Trump could say "drill baby drill" and people believed this would make them better off.

Our scriptures do teach about abundance, but the overarching message is always aimed at the community, not individuals. This is the 'manna principle'. During the Exodus people were instructed to take only what they needed. In Acts we read of the nascent Christian community sharing everything they had, not as forced austerity but in joyful freedom from scarcity's lie.

Going back to our reading from Colossians. Paul's vision for God's people is cosmic: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3). To "set our minds on things above" isn't escapism; it's the foundation for earthly resistance. If Christ is our life, then we are free to live with less, because our worth isn't tied to our possessions or wealth. This in turn compels us to challenge systems that sacrifice people and planet for profit.

Basil the Great, one of the early Church Fathers was a doughnut economist ahead of his time. He said, "If everyone took only what was necessary for their needs, leaving the rest to those in want, there would be no rich and no poor". He then went on to say "When someone strips a man of his

clothes, he is called a thief. But when someone fails to clothe the naked, though able to do so, is he worthy of any other name?" I find this hugely challenging, but I also think it offers an invitation to all of us to rethink. What do we really need? For those of us who do have money to invest, how can we support regenerative economies like renewable energy, fair trade, living wages, local food etc. What are we doing to demand change by putting pressure on our politicians to develop systems that respect our ecological limits and human dignity.

Here in the Cathedral, we talk a lot about moral imagination. The rich fool's tragedy wasn't his wealth but his lack of imagination. He couldn't envision a world where abundance is shared, where 'enough' is sacred. But Christ resurrects our imagination. In a world where greed is considered good, we are called to be part of a worldwide resistance movement —living lightly, loving boldly, and storing up treasures where moths, rust, and market crashes cannot reach.