

Sunday 27 September 2026
Harvest

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Deuteronomy 8: 7-14
NT: I Timothy 6: 3-10
Gp: Luke 18: 18-30

Some questions seek information; others arise because something within us is unsettled. Those of a certain age may remember Columbo, the American television detective, and his famous catchphrase, “Just one more thing.” He used it partly to gather information, but also because he sensed that the person he was questioning was guilty or knew something about the suspect he was pursuing. I call my mum and dad “Columbo” because, whenever I am leaving after a visit, one of them always says, “Just one more thing.” In their case, they simply want to keep me there a little longer—and I love them all the more for it.

The ruler who approaches Jesus asks one of the deepest questions a person can ask: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He is earnest, respectful and apparently faithful. He has influence, moral discipline and wealth. From the outside, his life looks secure. Yet he comes to Jesus because he senses that something is missing.

That makes this passage especially appropriate for a planned giving season and today as we celebrate harvest. A planned giving scheme may involve budgets, pledges, repairs, ministries and plans, but beneath all those practical matters lies a spiritual question: What has first claim on our lives? Stewardship is not simply a way to fund the church. It is the practice of placing everything we are and everything we have under the gracious rule of God.

Jesus looks at this man, sees beyond his achievements and addresses the one place he has kept beyond surrender. In doing so, Jesus also looks lovingly at us. He calls us from anxious possession to faithful participation, from calculating what we can spare to discovering what grace makes possible.

Jesus then names commandments concerning our relationships with other people: do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and honour your father and mother. The ruler answers, “I have kept all these since my youth.” We need not assume he is boasting. He may be telling the truth as he understands it. His life has been disciplined and respectable.

But faithful living is more than avoiding obvious wrongdoing. It is possible to obey many commands and still organise life around a substitute god. Jesus says, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” The command is personal and precise. Jesus touches the ruler’s wealth because his wealth has become the foundation of his identity, security and freedom.

Stewardship begins here. God does not merely want a portion of our income while leaving the centre of our lives untouched. God seeks our trust. Our giving reveals what we believe about security, sufficiency and the future. It asks whether we regard ourselves as owners who occasionally donate, or as stewards who gratefully manage what ultimately belongs to God.

Many of us understand that sadness. We may not be wealthy by every measure, but we know the instinct to hold tightly. We fear that generosity will leave us vulnerable. We wonder whether there will be enough for the mortgage or rent, for the children, for retirement, for an emergency. Those concerns are real, and Scripture does not praise recklessness or neglect of responsibility. Yet prudence can quietly become fear, and saving can quietly become self-salvation.

Jesus says, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." This deliberately impossible picture strips away the illusion that abundance can secure the soul. Wealth is not condemned as though coins themselves were evil. The danger is that wealth promises what only God can give: identity, protection, control and peace.

A planned giving scheme therefore invites more than a financial transaction. It invites conversion: a turning from fear to trust, from isolation to communion, and from ownership to gratitude. The question is not only, "How much does the church need?" It is also, "What kind of people is Jesus forming us to become?"

Jesus answers with the heart of the gospel: "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." Salvation is not the reward for perfect financial decisions. It is not purchased by a large pledge or earned by heroic sacrifice. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end. Grace reaches us, releases us and reshapes us.

This matters in a planned giving season because guilt can generate money for a moment, but only grace can form generous disciples. We do not give to make God love us. We give because in Jesus we have already received a love we could never buy. We do not give to prove that we are better than the rich ruler. We bring our own divided hearts to Jesus and ask him to do what is impossible for us: to make us free.

Our stewardship is a response to that divine generosity. We offer time because our days are gifts. We offer abilities because they were entrusted to us. We offer money because our capacity to earn, save and share exists within God's provision. We offer our whole selves because Christ first gave himself for us.

Peter now says, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." His words carry both faith and uncertainty. Have their sacrifices mattered? Jesus assures the disciples that no one who has left home or family for the sake of God's kingdom will fail to receive many times more in this age, and eternal life in the age to come.

That is the vision our planned giving scheme should serve. We are not maintaining an institution for its own sake. We are sustaining a community in which the gospel is proclaimed, children and adults are formed in faith, worship is offered and our neighbourhood encounters the love of Jesus.

Every pledge participates in that ministry. A regular gift may help keep the church warm and open, support pastoral care, provide resources for worship, nurture children and young people, serve people facing hardship, and maintain a place of prayer and hope. Administration, insurance and repairs may not sound dramatic, but they create the dependable framework within which ministry can flourish.

How, then, might we respond? First, let us pray. Before we choose a figure, let us place our lives before God. We might ask: What have I received? What am I holding too tightly? Whose need is God asking me to notice? What would it mean for my giving to express trust rather than habit?

Second, let us give intentionally. Generosity is rarely sustained by good intentions alone. A considered, regular commitment can become a spiritual rhythm, like worship and prayer. For some, faithfulness may mean beginning to give for the first time. For others, it may mean increasing a gift, even modestly. For others, altered circumstances may require a smaller commitment. Equal gifts are not the goal; shared faithfulness is.

Third, let us give honestly and without comparison. Jesus honours the gift offered in faith, and the church must honour members whose contribution takes forms other than money, such as time given freely. No one should risk food, housing or essential care in order to meet an expectation. We seek joyful, responsible generosity, not pressure.

Fourth, let us give hopefully. Our gifts are seeds entrusted to God. We may not see every conversation encouraged, every child formed, every prayer answered or every neighbour helped. Yet God can multiply ordinary acts of faithfulness into a harvest of grace.

Finally, let us give ourselves. The ruler was asked not merely to transfer assets but to follow Jesus. A completed pledge card is not the destination. The destination is deeper discipleship: lives made available to Jesus and to one another.

The painful truth in this passage is that the ruler walks away sad. Jesus does not chase him with a reduced demand. Love allows the invitation to remain real. But the story leaves us with a question: Must we also walk away, or can grace lead us into freedom?

Perhaps the “one thing” we lack is not another possession, another programme or another achievement. Perhaps it is the freedom that comes when Jesus becomes our treasure. The good news is that Jesus does not leave us to create that freedom by willpower. “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” God can soften a guarded heart. God can turn anxiety into trust. God can take a congregation’s varied gifts and weave them into shared ministry.

As we consider our response to this planned giving scheme, may we remember the gaze of Jesus upon the ruler. It is a searching gaze, but it is also a loving one. Jesus calls us not into scarcity but into the abundance of God’s kingdom: treasure that cannot be lost, relationships that become family, work that bears eternal significance, and life centred on the One who alone is good.

So let us not ask only, “What can I afford to give without noticing?” Let us prayerfully ask, “How is Jesus inviting me to follow?” Let households talk openly. Let those who live alone reflect with trusted friends. Let all of us listen for the Spirit without pressure and without fear. Then let us respond with gratitude, courage and joy.

For our Church, the ministry before us belongs to all of us because first it belongs to God. The resources in our hands are not obstacles to discipleship when they are placed in Jesus’s hands. They become instruments of welcome, worship, mercy and mission. May our planned

giving scheme reveal not simply that we can meet a target, but that God is forming a generous people whose treasure is in heaven and whose lives prove that here on earth.

Just one more thing...

Mthr Jennifer Brady