

People just want more and more

Sermon for the 7th Sunday after Trinity, 3rd August 2025

Readings [Colossians 3.1–11](#); [Luke 12.13–21](#)

For me, the song of the summer of 2025 will be from the Women's European Football Championships. 'Freed from Desire' [if you are not too familiar with this 1990s Eurodance floor-filler, click this [link](#)] boomed round the stadiums in Switzerland, and you can hear a triumphant England team singing it – [shrieking](#) it – in their dressing room.

It's odd to sing about being freed from desire at an event that is all about the stuff, but then 'Sweet Caroline' is [England's anthem](#) when there is no-one of that name (sweet or sour) in the entire squad. Never let logic get in the way of a tune that is (how might we put it?) so good.

Anyway, the question: do we need to be freed from desire? The song belongs to Gala Rizzato, who [says](#) it sprang from her experience when she first moved to New York and noticed 'incredible disparities, inequalities between people' that she hadn't noticed so much growing up in Europe (I think we've caught up in these 30 years). Hence her lines:

Want more and more,

People just want more and more.

Which brings us to Jesus' parable, and the man with bigger barn syndrome. Jesus tells it to make the point that (as our translation puts it, in posh-vicar-speak) 'life does not consist in the abundance of possessions' – in other words, life is not about having lots of stuff.

Here is a man who, having met all his own needs, has no thought for anyone else's. He thinks only of himself and talks only to himself. He muses on what to do with his bumper crop: What shall I do? I'll build bigger barns, and I'll say to my soul, relax, eat, drink, be merry. To which God says, you fool. You have all this stuff, but what if you lose the one thing that matters? What if you aren't alive to enjoy it?

Talk of life and death brings me to a book that a young guy in my other church put me on to, and I am so glad he did: most of what follows I owe to [*Fully Alive*](#) by Elizabeth Oldfield.

The book charts her path back to the Christian faith she had thrown over in her twenties, and she does it through the prism of the traditional seven deadly sins, reminding us on the way that sin is not so much to do with indulging in sensual pleasures (ice cream, perhaps) but with fraying the threads that connect us to each other, to the natural world, and to God.

Paul lists a few in our first reading, and a common theme in them is what she calls the 'seductive temptation of disconnection', the idea that other people don't matter except insofar as they are useful to me.

For the man with bigger barn syndrome, his sin is greed, or that particular type of greed called Avarice, No.2 in the Maleficent Seven.

Oldfield knows all about avarice, the belief that to be fully alive you need material abundance, that accumulation equals happiness. She says that most of us know that this is not true, but we struggle to live the truth in practice, because the system we are part of relies on us *not* living out that truth.

This is a real dilemma. I want there to be enough money to pay doctors properly, to fund schools and care for those of us in the last age of life – and to defend ourselves properly. But for all that to happen, as the Chancellor tells us, we need economic growth. And constant growth means that when actual needs have been met, false needs must be created, so that yesterday's 'nice to have' becomes today's essential and we crave tomorrow's next new thing. Just think of smartphones.

What to do? The answer may be – nothing. You may say that this is not your problem. If you are in a struggle to pay bills and buy food, then yes, avarice is not a risk you face. In fact, your predicament shows some of the damage that the culture of avarice produces.

Oldfield quotes a terrifying [sermon](#), preached 1600 years ago by a bishop called Basil, on this very story of Jesus.

Who are the greedy? Those who are not satisfied with what suffices for their own needs. Who are the robbers? Those who take for themselves what rightfully belongs to everyone.

He then addresses his flock directly.

And you, are you not greedy? Are you not a robber?...The bread you are holding back is for the hungry, the clothes you keep put away are for the naked, the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for those who have none, the silver you keep buried in the ground is for the needy. You are thus guilty of injustice toward as many as you might have helped, and did not.

Oldfield confesses how uncomfortable she is when she thinks about this, that she complicit in a machine of injustice produced by our 'culture of insatiable desires' (that word again).

But, she asks, what am I supposed to do? Make myself and my kids destitute? No. But nor does she want to be cheated by what Jesus calls 'the deceitfulness of wealth' (Mark 4.19). Being in love with money she says is like 'dating a charming liar'. So here are her two projects to escape the suffocating lie that life is about lots of stuff: gratitude and generosity.

First, gratitude.

You can't be grateful for what you think you have achieved all by yourself.

Gratitude signals that you have received something – help, or a gift. It connects you to others. The man in the story has received something – it's his land that has performed well, not his farming genius – yet he feels no gratitude. He just sees an opportunity to cash in.

Oldfield finds that gratitude is a kind of attention training – seeing afresh what you have got used to. You know how annoying it is when you talk to someone and they keep looking over your shoulder? We can also do that with stuff: so anxious are we to get on to the next thing that we take for granted what's in front of us. So when you stay for refreshments after the service (and I hope you will) before you grab...pause: think for a moment about all it took to get that hobnob or cup of beverage into your hand. Oldfield often prays this prayer:

God, help me to receive the gifts I have already been given.

Second, generosity.

In his sermon St Basil talks as if my surplus stuff isn't really mine, but belongs to those who need it more; but he says that hanging on to it is bad for me too. Oldfield agrees. For her, giving is an act of resistance: 'it breaks the chokehold of money' on her life, and calls out 'the lie that accumulation will save us'.

Generosity does as much good to the giver as to the receiver.

But back to that song. Isn't all this actually saying that we *do* need to be freed from desire? Long ago, in the 1600s, the poet Thomas Traherne thought not. His poem 'Desire' sees it as a precious gift that makes it possible to yearn for God. He talks about a 'restless longing, heavenly avarice' that cannot be satisfied by 'dead material toys' but only by the one who has lit that flame of desire in us.

We do indeed 'want more and more' – but that is because you and I were made to be (as Jesus also says) 'rich towards God'.