

## Wealth

One of the major issues facing our world today is the gulf between the rich and the poor and the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. For this is a contributory factor in many conflicts and situations of unrest, when wealth and power go hand in hand. This is of course not a new phenomenon and has existed since time immemorial. However, it does appear to be more acute than ever before. And we are talking about inequality both between and within nations.

In a report last year it was stated that half of the world's wealth was in the hands of just one percent of the world's population. And it would not be surprising if the gap has widened this year. We have stories of people with huge amounts of wealth. We hear of directors and others who earn enormous salaries that simply bear no relation to what most in their companies earn.

Wealth itself is neutral. It is what we do with it that is important. In his words to the rich man that we heard just now our Lord is quite clear: to be his true disciples we should sell our possessions and give the money to the poor (Matthew 19.16-26). We are told that the man went away grieving. This was something too difficult for him to do. Faced with that same challenge I imagine we can feel much the same.

Whether this means selling everything is open to interpretation. But we are called to be generous and support those in need, though clearly in proportion to our own situation.

It is easy to blame the rich for the problems of our world, and with some justification. Yet there are those who do make their wealth available for the general good. It was announced just the other day that the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, and his wife are going to invest three billion dollars in research to help combat all diseases.

The Scottish American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who gave almost ninety percent of his fortune to charities, foundations, universities and libraries wrote these words back in 1889: "Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer for the good of the community." And of course in York we have the fine example of Joseph Rowntree who did just that.

Andrew Carnegie inspired many other philanthropists to devote their energies to the common good, not least Bill Gates, who is probably still the world's richest man.

Wealth used in this way can do much good. For wealth may allow the enjoyment of luxuries to the one who possess it but it also brings with it great responsibilities. As the poet John Donne said "No man is an island". We are all bound together by our common humanity as children of God.

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