

## **JADON: Financial justice**

When I was reading the gospels, I was thinking a lot about the concept of sin. And in particular, what caught my attention is just how often when sin is mentioned, it is to do with money.

We all of course know about the beatitudes, which Christ is documented to have preached in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and in the Gospel of Luke he also details a number of “woes” which are as follows: “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”

I think these statements are very profound, especially the very last of those. I would also like to point out, however, that two out of four of these woes are to those with wealth or excess of material things.

I strongly believe that one of the foundations of the church has been aiding those in poverty, feeding the hungry and not storing up unnecessary wealth on Earth since Jesus told us, according to the gospel of Matthew, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth...

...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...

...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

And so, I’d like us to take a moment to think about where we are as a church in this regard. Have we been following Christ’s example?

Many of the churches I’ve been to are indeed making an effort to feed the hungry as part of our mission. I remember when I went to St James’ in Goldenacre, there were very regular donations to the Basics Bank. In Old St Paul’s, where I currently go to worship, we host a community lunch every Monday open to all and, to quote a piece on the Old St Paul’s website, “We get a wonderful mix of OSP members, students, visitors to Edinburgh...

...and a sizeable number of very respectful (and very hungry) people without homes and families.”

A few years ago, many of us in the Episcopal church raised money for Social Bite by partaking in their event “Sleep in the Park” and those of us who were too young to take part at the time, such as myself, took part in the “Wee Sleep Out”, which turned out to be extremely successful and landed the Diocese of Edinburgh in the top donors to Social Bite.

So, I am overjoyed to say that yes, our efforts as a church have been very effective indeed.

Now let’s take it to the next level.

This is now the third time I have spoken at Synod as a youth representative, and each time I have tried my best to suggest practical solutions that we can strive towards as a church or implement in our churches on an individual basis. So, here's what I think we should do going forward:

First of all, I'd like to say something akin to how Saint Paul opens his letter to the church in Rome: you're doing well! I'm proud to be a member of a church where this is a part of our mission. However, I feel it's time for us to do a little bit more.

According to the Scottish Government's data, the wealthiest 2% of households in Scotland own 18% of all Scotland's wealth. If you compare the average household wealth of the richest 10% and the poorest 10% of households, it's £1.7 million compared to £7,600. I believe that as a church we should stand together in being more vocal about the inequality of wealth. We should be preaching that the unfair distribution of wealth is wrong and must be rectified. We should be preaching to feed the hungry and house the homeless because that was what Christ told us to do. When doing research for this talk, I found out that we as the episcopal church during the pandemic had backed a campaign to help children keep getting free school meals. However, I don't remember this at all because no one really mentioned it. I think that as a church we need to be bolder about speaking up and telling people in power what they should be doing.

On the scale of individual churches, we should increase our contribution to food banks, and our community meals. In practice, these rely on engaging our congregations. You'll recall that Jesus said to the rich man "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." In today's world, we don't have to sell all of our possessions to follow Christ, but we should still be prepared to part with excess that we don't need for the benefit of those who need it, and I believe it's important to preach this message to our congregations that the Christian life should be one of service and that we should be giving more money and more time to these causes, and other charities combatting the issues of poverty.

So I ask all here in this room to think about this and to pray about this, because I very strongly believe that this is a core part of our faith and our duty as disciples of Christ. So, let's go do as Jesus taught us, helping others in need and treating them as we would have them treat us.