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A King who had no heir to succeed him posted a notice inviting young men to come along with a view to succeeding him as King. The two qualifications for the post were love of God and neighbour. A poor peasant boy decided to apply. He worked hard, bought some new clothes, and headed off to the interview. He was half way there, however, when he met a poor beggar on the road, who was shivering with the cold. The young man felt so sorry for him and he exchanged his new clothes with him. So he was back in rags again. He arrived at the King's palace, and despite the sneers and jibes of the courtiers, he was finally admitted into the presence of the king. Imagine his amazement to see that the king was the old beggar-man he had met on the road, and he was actually wearing the new clothes the young man had given him. The king got down from his throne, embraced the young man, and said, 'Welcome my son, you shall inherit my kingdom.'

On one occasion Jesus praised a poor widow for putting her 'last penny' into the Temple Treasury. In fact, giving without counting the cost is at the very heart of the Gospel and that applies to our hard-earned cash as anything else. Being stingy hardly tallies with the gospel mandate to love. There's an old Irish proverb which says: 'when the hand ceases to scatter, the mouth ceases to praise'. We often hear it said at funerals that he or she would give you their last penny. That's saying a lot.

We know money is necessary and we cannot live without it. Some say that 'it's the root of all evil'. However, the Scriptures tell us different - that it's the love of money which should cause the alarm bells to ring.

Jesus says today 'use money that tainted thing to win you friends'. He's not talking here about the 'fair weather' type. They're prone to drop us fairly promptly when hard times beckon. That's what happened to the prodigal Son in last Sunday's story, if you remember.

In sharing what we have with others we'll be winning ourselves friends right across the board and if they reach the eternal shores before us they'll be on the lookout to 'welcome us into the tents of eternity'.

'God loves a cheerful giver' the scriptures tell us. Yes, we can do what we like with our cash but we'll still have to answer to God as to how we used it. Jesus told us to 'lay-up treasure in heaven, not on earth'. We do this by becoming less grasping and more giving. We can also squander money on wasteful things, showing scant regard for the disadvantaged and needy people of this world. Worse still we might be tempted to judge a person's worth by the size of his and her bank balance – not a very clever thing to do.

We cannot take it with us, no matter how much we stashed away or how long we live. The old burial shroud has no pockets. But whatever we give away with a good heart will not go unrewarded – 'a cup of cold water given in love will not go without its reward' Jesus says. 'Repayment will be made to us when the virtuous rise again'.