

“Asking the right questions” – Luke 16: 1-13;

Are you feeling lucky? Is today your lucky day?

When it comes to life – do you feel lucky or are you running low on luck?

Every Christmas in Spain, there's a lottery draw so massive it's called El Gordo, which translates as “the fat one.”

And the tiny village of Sodeto had some serious cause for celebration after all of the 70 households — purchased tickets. And these lucky locals' number came up (58268), resulting in them getting a share of the monster \$950 million first-place prize. Do the maths. Sure enough, the residents, mainly farmers and unemployed construction workers, walked away with millions.

That is one lucky village where everyone is a winner, well almost everyone. You see there are in fact 71 households in Sodeto and unfortunately the good folk from the homemakers association who were selling the tickets neglected to knock on this guy's door. (show pic)

Ouch! That is one unlucky guy!

This guy - Frano Selak is regarded as the world's luckiest man. (Show picture – available on Web)

He is known as the luckiest man because he has managed to cheat death seven times. He had his first escape in 1962 when a train he was travelling on jumped the rails and plunged into an icy river.

Seventeen people drowned and he barely made it to the riverbank.

A year later, he was thrown out of a plane on his first and only flight when a door flew open.

This time 19 people died but he was thrown clear of the crash and landed in a haystack.

Then in 1966, a bus he was on skidded into a river, drowning four. He swam to safety with just cuts and bruises.

Accident number four came in 1970 when his car caught fire as he drove along a motorway - he fled with seconds to spare before the fuel tank exploded.

Three years later, he lost most of his hair when a faulty fuel pump spewed petrol over the hot engine of his car and blew flames through the air vents.

In 1995 he was hit by a bus in but walked away with minor injuries.

The following year, he was driving in the mountains when he turned a corner to see a UN truck coming straight for him.

His Skoda careered through a crash barrier and over the 300ft precipice. But he leapt clear at the last minute and sat in a tree as he watched his car hit the bottom and explode.

How unbelievable is that!? 7 lucky escapes! But wait there's more – (show next slide) he then won £600,000 with his first ever lottery ticket. That is one lucky guy!

Or is it?

When asked about how he felt to be regarded as the luckiest man in the world this is what he said: *"I never thought I was lucky to survive all my brushes with death. I thought I was unlucky to be in them in the first place."*

So what do you think lucky or unlucky? To win 600,000 pounds is certainly lucky!

So, are you feeling lucky today? (*Invite someone up who is feeling lucky – throw a six - the chocolate bar is theirs*)...

Growing up I always thought my younger brother Reuben who is the Chaplain at the junior schools was the lucky one in our family – he had this uncanny knack of winning prizes. He was the envy of all of us when he won the ultimate prize at Georgie Pie – it was some sort of gameboy – a bit like winning an iPhone today! I came close once to taking the honour off him when we went to the Premier of Willow at the Monterey theatre in Howick. They were giving away prizes based on ticket numbers and Reuben let me choose which of the two tickets I wanted – given it was him I figured I had a fifty-fifty chance of getting it right – I came oh so close – in fact I was sitting right next to him when he one the big prize yet again...

What about you? Do you feel unlucky or lucky in life?

Clint Eastwood puts it rather brilliantly in the film Dirty Harry – let's have a look: (Show clip – available on Pressschools website)

You gotta ask yourself one question: Do I feel lucky? Well do ya punk? Do ya? It's a good question isn't it – do you feel lucky? When it comes to life – do ya feel lucky? Well do ya?

The Quadrangular tournament is taking place at St Andrews in Christchurch this year – for a number of your peers it will be the first time they have been down their since the major earthquakes.

You may know this already but let me throw some statistics at you - 85% of all homes in Christchurch were untouched by the initial September earthquake in 2010. That's an unlucky 15%. Of those 100,000 unlucky homeowners, 5000 were uninsured – and about 430 homes were damaged beyond repair. As one geologist put it *'there were several unlucky people who had the fault go right through their home.'*

That's some seriously bad luck for some and yet as we know not one person was killed in that quake – as one Christchurch woman put it *"Buildings can be replaced, people cannot. We got so lucky here in Christchurch."*

And then 5 months later their luck changed again when the February quake hit, this time their were casualties with 185 people losing their lives and the devastation to the city was on a massive scale. Some people survived because they were on a lunch break, others because they had happened to walk left instead of right but in the end everybody was effected and everyone felt the distaster at a personal level.

So were they all unlucky or were some lucky to have survived at all? Is life about the roll of the dice – get what you get and don't get upset?

What do you think?

And what about you? Do you feel lucky? Well do ya?

Or is this the wrong question? Maybe luck has nothing to do with it at all?

The people Jesus was talking to when he told the parable we heard today understood the language of luck – they believed if life had not gone their way it was because God had made them unlucky – cursed. If life was good it was because God had made them lucky – blessed – it was as simple as that. They even made judgements on why some were made lucky and others weren't – they believed the lucky ones were those who were in relationship with God and the unlucky ones were outside of that relationship – sinners they called them. The poor were poor because God had made them so because they were unlucky to the core...it was just how things were.

Jesus of course challenged this ideology, he spent most of his time with the unlucky ones eating and drinking and telling stories...it was as if he preferred their company and it was of great concern to the blessed people of the day that he did. He made crazy statements like blessed/lucky are the poor and blessed are those who mourn for theirs is the Kingdom of God. It didn't make a lot of sense to those who had done well out of life – it probably didn't make much sense to those who hadn't. It was a strange way to view life.

Jesus told a lot of parables about those who were down on their luck and who God came looking for –the lost sheep, the lost coin and the Prodigal Son are ones I'm sure you are all familiar with. However he also told the parable of the shrewd manager – the one we heard today, a parable, that offers quite a different perspective on luck.

This story is about a man who has that uncanny ability so often admired in people, to turn his luck around, an opportunist of the first order. About to lose his job for poor management of company resources, he goes in search of those who owe the company money and alters the amounts. You owe \$100,000 make it \$50,000. You owe \$20,000 make it \$15,000.

Remember me – I'm the guy who told you it was your lucky day!

Jesus then went on to say that when this man's boss discovered what he had done – instead of putting him in prison, he was impressed and commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness!

Jesus said blessed are the poor – he also seemed to say blessed/lucky are those who are clever enough to make life work for them, learn from such people who know how to use wealth to make friends and influence people – learn from them to make the most of what you have at your disposal because if you are no good at managing worldly wealth how are you can be able to handle true riches – the kind that only God can give?

But! And this was for both those with plenty of luck and good fortune and for those who felt unlucky in life – But! Jesus says – here is some Truth with a capital T – you can only serve one master.

One ideology will define your life, one thing will define the questions we ask and the framework we live by – Jesus said it would be God or it would be Money. We may have other ideologies to add to that mix. But

it seems that one and only one will dominate and determine our lives and our view of the world.

What is it for you?

Jesus could see that there were people gathered around him with plenty and those with hardly anything whose lives were ruled by Money or the lack thereof – it was determining their choices, it was framing their questions, it was keeping them awake at night and getting them up in the morning...and it was leaving them feeling lucky or unlucky as a result.

And that is the problem with money isn't it – you never have enough. When the richest man in the world was asked how much he would need before he would be satisfied he said: Just a little bit more.

God says I will give you all you need if you put your trust in me. That is why Jesus called these people to shift their ideological framework – to live for God, to allow God to influence the whole of their lives – so they might know God's presence when they were down on their luck and when everything was going their way...the God who says there is always a bigger picture – and that even in the midst of crisis there is the possibility of good.

It says in Psalm 146 that those who look to God for help, those who choose to put their hope in God will know what it is to be blessed – to be lucky in life.

So let me ask you: Do you feel lucky? Do you feel blessed?

I hope you do.

Let's pray...