

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent**  
**Genesis 1: 1 – 2:4; Romans 8 18-25; Matthew 24-34**  
**St James, Shirley 8 February 2026**

**Sermon: Wise investments**

**Medals**

Last week the Winter Olympics began. Every four years we watch athletes who have poured years, sometimes decades, of their lives into something that culminates in a single moment. Early mornings on the ice, endless training sessions, sacrifices made by them and their families. They invest everything: time, bodies, money and their hopes. For many of them, the crucial moment itself can be counted in seconds: a routine, a jump, a final curl amongst many others.

What strikes me is not just the physical skill, but the investment that goes in in the years before the moment. They commit themselves wholeheartedly to something they believe is worth it. They trust that the hours they put in today will shape the future they long for. And even when the outcome is uncertain, or unlikely, they keep going. They invest in something bigger than the moment. Their aim? A medal; recognition for their country; a hope realised.

And that, I think, is where our readings take us today. God invites us to think about what we're investing in, our time, our attention, our trust, and how those choices shape our life experience.

**God the investor**

Genesis 1 gives us a picture of God who doesn't simply create the world but invests in it with extraordinary care, patience and purpose. The opening verses show God hovering over the formless deep, not rushing, not panicking, but attending to creation with the calm focus of someone who knows exactly what they are building and trying to achieve.

Every act of creation is deliberate. God speaks light into being, separates waters, shapes land, fills sky and sea and soil. Nothing

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is accidental or haphazard. This is investment: time, intention, imagination and love, all poured into something that will flourish.

And God doesn't just make the world *functional* but makes it *beautiful*. Fruit trees that are pleasing to the eye. Stars scattered like jewels. Creatures that teem and soar and crawl. Beauty is never only what's needed, it's generous, its more than. It's the sign of someone who invests not the minimum, not just what they have to, but the best.

Then, at each stage, God steps back and calls it, not just good *enough*, but good. That is an affirmation of value. God is naming creation as something worth cherishing, worth tending and worth entrusting to others.

When humanity is formed in God's image, the first vocation we receive is stewardship: to care for what God has invested in. We are invited to join the work, not as owners but as partners, and fellow investors.

God's investment doesn't stop with creation. In Jesus, God invests in us again: entering our world, sharing our life, carrying our burdens - offering us a future rooted in *hope*. Both creation and Christ point us forward: God has invested in the world, and God has invested in us. And both offer hope - hope that awaits us if we respond to God's invitation. We call that salvation.

### **Anxiety and worry**

Our response to God's investment though, can often be anxiety. Jesus knows this. He doesn't dismiss it. He doesn't shame us for it. He simply names it: "Do not worry." And he names the particular kind of worry he's talking about — today's reading: the worry that comes from money, possessions, and the fear of not having enough.

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This passage isn't about health or safety or the deep concerns we carry for those we love. Jesus isn't telling us to ignore real dangers or pretend everything is fine.

He is speaking specifically about the kind of worry that comes from trying to secure our lives based on wealth - the kind of worry that can creep in when we *feel* we don't have enough, or when what we have feels fragile, especially in comparison to others.

And I want to be honest about this, because Jesus is honest about it. It is a very legitimate and natural thing to worry when we don't have enough, or when what we have is threatened to be taken away from us.

I still have vivid memories as a child of bailiffs in our house, threatening to take things away. I remember clearly, the man from the MEB - Midland Electricity Board for those who remember - turning up to cut off the power because the bills hadn't been paid. And after seeing me, off ill from school, saying to Mom that he was going get his backside kicked because he refused to do it. He used a different word to backside! That was a very real worry. And many people today share similar kinds of worries: the fear of the brown envelope with red lettering, the rising cost of living, the uncertainty of the future.

And for us as a church, there are some very real issues about finances. We're not alone in that, many parishes are feeling the strain, but it's important to be honest about where we are. If we were to pay our full contribution to the diocese, covering the cost of having a minister in post, the training of ministers across the diocese, and the support we receive for essential administrative and legal responsibilities, we would be facing a shortfall of around £1,100 every week compared with our current income.

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That's a significant gap. And so our PCC took the decision that we couldn't pay it. That has ramifications for the whole church in Birmingham.

When Jesus says 'Don't worry' he isn't being flippant but asking us to ponder and prioritise what we invest in.

Because Jesus also knows that worry can take another form — a more frivolous, more subtle one. The kind of worry that comes from investing too much in the wrong things. The vanity Jesus mentions, clothing, appearance, status, has its modern equivalents. The pressure to keep up. The anxiety of comparing ourselves to others, especially the false images which permeate society. The fear of not looking successful enough, or sorted enough, or secure enough.

And Jesus says gently but firmly: "You cannot serve God and wealth." Not because wealth is evil, but because it makes a terrible god. It demands everything and gives little back. It promises security but can deliver anxiety. It can trick us to constantly striving harder, holding tighter, worrying more, filling every gap with productivity.

Many nations use something called GDP, Gross Domestic Product, as a reflection of wealth and productivity, as an indicator of health and success – a god in effect.

Jesus invites us to invest in a better mindset.

**The dividend of trust: hope**

And that brings us to Romans 8, one of the most hope-filled passages in Scripture. St Paul speaks of creation groaning, longing for renewal, waiting for the future God has promised. And he speaks of us groaning too, longing for the redemption of our bodies, longing for the world to be made right.

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And then he says something remarkable: “By hope we were saved.” Hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is not optimism. Hope is the confidence that God’s investment in creation and in us will not be wasted. Hope is the assurance that God’s future is already secured.

St Paul says that hope is something we wait for with patience. Not passive waiting, but active trust – confident expectancy. The kind of trust that shapes how we live now. The kind of trust that frees us from anxious striving. The kind of trust that helps us see what really matters and what really doesn’t.

When we invest in trust, or in other words, when we seek and invest in God’s kingdom, the dividend, the result, is hope. Hope that strengthens us in the present. Hope that steadies us in uncertainty. Hope that helps us let go of the things that don’t matter and hold on to the things that do.

And knowing this hope helps us get through present challenges. It puts away anxiety over what really isn’t that important. It roots us in something deeper, something lasting and something eternal.

**The invitation**

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As noble as an athlete's lifelong investment is in order to gain a medal, it is nothing next to the hope which comes from investing in seeking God's kingdom.

So, as Jesus invites us to look at our hearts, we ask ourselves:

What are we investing in?

Is the future we are helping build, making the Kingdom more visible?

Are we investing in hope — real hope, not the fragile stuff the false gods of the world offer?

God has invested in creation. God has invested in salvation. And God invites us to invest in the things that last — compassion, justice, worship, community, hope.

And the promise is this:

Investing in God's kingdom frees us from anxious striving and roots us in the peace and hope that only God can give.

In this parish, may that be our investment. May that be our commitment. And may that be our future. Amen

*Rev'd Richard Haynes 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent 8 February 2026*