A few days ago I went to see my tax advisor. With all respect to Her majesty's Revenue and Customs advertising I'm afraid that I, along with most other clergy, find tax very taxing. It's not that I mind actually paying my share to run this great nation: I just mind the complexity of working out how much to pay – counting the few pence interest that I get on my savings now, I'd happily hand the lot over to Mr Osborne if it would save having to add it all up to tell him how much I've received. I couldn't buy a round of drinks with it, so what he intends to do with a few percent of it I cannot imagine.

If you listen to the mass media you would think that sex, or, rather, hypocrisy about - and avoidance of - sex, were at the centre of the Church's teaching. But when you actually look at Jesus' teaching itself you will see that far more of what he said was about money. Indeed, his recorded sayings are more about money than any other subject. Far more. Money seems to have mattered to him and he and the evangelists who wrote the Gospels clearly wanted us to understand that money matters to him.

What matters to God, of course, is not money itself. Indeed, as investors in certain so-called financial “products” have discovered, money does not have any intrinsic value at all, just what we mortals agree to pretend it has! No, what interests God is our attitudes towards money, and the use to which we put the money under our own control – and this applies to individuals and to the nation. How we vote and campaign for our taxes to be spent as well as how we spend what we have in our pockets and bank accounts. The reason it matters so much is that money is supremely a symbol. It is, in fact, ONLY a symbol, which is why its value can vary so much from nothing to a very great deal. Money is a symbol of who and what we are, for we gain it by, for example, the work we do, the career we choose, the family into which we are born or the games we play and win. It is also a symbol of who and what we are for the way we spend it and share it reflects our priorities and our interests. So Jesus says, for example, that where your treasure is, your heart will be also: how you use your money or other wealth is a clear reflection of the way you think and feel, as Mr Cameron might say, your values.

You don't need me, or even God, I suppose, to tell you that the nation, along with most other nations, faces a difficult time with its, our, money over the next few years. You can be pretty confident that this will also apply to County, District and Town and Parish Councils, too, and we shall have to choose through our democratic system what spending will have to be cut and what retained (or even increased to enable savings elsewhere, perhaps). The responsibility for these decisions rests with those ordinary men and women who have stood up and allowed us to elect them to office at all these levels and I do not envy them one little bit. (It beats me why anyone ever wishes to be Prime Minister: I am simply glad that enough do to allow us something resembling a choice.) These people certainly need our prayers. The pages of the newspapers, national and local, will tell them about everything they could have, and in the opinion of the writers should have, done differently. But it is easy to criticize in opposition or in the press gallery or even in the café or pub because none of our decisions gets put to the test: it is those in parliament and council chamber who actually have to take decisions on our behalf. It is easy to write a letter to the Mercury and call your own view “common sense”, less easy to make the sacrifice of several meetings a year by having your name put on the ballot paper and read all the evidence and then see what happens in the town when your ideas are actually subjected to the test of real life!

Councillor David Brailsford has begun his mayoral year. Today's little ceremony celebrates something which has already begun, a sacrifice already being made. As I said last year about his predecessor, the day-to-day stuff of life in this lowest tier of government seems a long way from all this ritual – the mowing of the grass in the cemetery, the comments on planning applications, the
struggle to keep Stamford's voice heard in Grantham and Lincoln. Following Christ's example described in the bible reading you have just heard, the leadership we enjoy in this nation is that of humble service, on the whole. Most people enter politics at any level out of a desire to serve the people, and this is expressed and exemplified in the naming of our national leaders “ministers”: they minister to us, serve us, and the Prime Minister is the first servant. We don't expect Mayor David actually to wash our feet as Jesus did to set the example of humble leadership to those who a few days later would be the first leaders of his Church, but there will be times when such service will seem simple compared with what we do expect him to do. And doubtless our other councillors at all levels and our shiny new MP will feel similarly.

Most of the community will probably ignore you all most of the time, except when they think you've got it wrong. It is easy to be ignored here in Stamford, living as we do not just ON the edge but in a sense even BEYOND the edge of the County! I was in Lincoln the other day and there was a map of the County on the wall. I struggled to find Stamford, right down by the skirting board. In another room you had to move something to find our town on the map.

I'd like to assure Mayor David and his colleagues, Nick our MP and all our representatives at district and county councils, too, of my own prayers and the prayers of this and the other Christian churches of the town. You are not alone. We will remember you all before God whether we agree with what you are doing or not, when things are going well, when things are going less well and especially if things are going very badly indeed. And God will be with you, whether you can feel him or not.

I began with money and God's interest in how we gain it and how we use it, for that reflects our values. I'd urge those who have the stewardship of the money that we as citizens hand over as tax to consider what God might have them do with it, what values he would like to see reflected in that use. Is the use that to which the crucified King would put his name, the King who acted as a slave to his followers, the One placed in a manger because he had nowhere else at his birth among us? We can seldom be absolutely sure we've got it right, but we can try, and if we can strive always to use our own money and the public's money in a Godly way, then we shall be part of the answer to our daily prayer: your Kingdom come, your will be done.

Amen.