

**Luke 12:13-21**

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup>But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” <sup>16</sup>Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup>And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ <sup>18</sup>Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ <sup>20</sup>But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ <sup>21</sup>So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

## Sermon – July 31, 2022

I thought I would call this sermon ‘How to Get Rich’. But maybe it’s more about how to **‘be’ rich**. Here’s a quote:

**“He who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever.”**

— John Tillotson

In our Gospel Jesus gives a strong warning against wealth and greed. It is not where we find true security. Jesus clearly says that the reason we are here on earth is **not** to procure an abundance of possessions, despite how many of us act! These are not popular words in our consumer society. And yet, Jesus spoke a great deal about possessions and wealth including in this morning’s Gospel.

The man in this morning’s Gospel was part of a large crowd being taught by Jesus. Jesus was preparing them for tough times ahead...he was commending the Holy Spirit to them...these were weighty matters. They would be persecuted in days to come. So the man’s urgent request about his inheritance was inappropriate; an interruption. But he just couldn’t wait. He was disgruntled. He wanted Jesus to intervene in his personal inheritance issue with his brother. People often did ask the Rabbi to mediate and decree what the law required in such disputes. But this man wasn’t really asking Jesus. He thought he knew what was ‘right’ and **instructs** Jesus to tell his brother to divide his inheritance.

Jesus’ answer is a warning. ‘Take care! He says. ‘Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’

Then he tells a parable.

A man, already rich, has crops which produced abundantly. Remember, the man is already rich. All his basic needs are being met. Notice that what he receives is an unexpected crop blessing due to good conditions which produced a greater than usual yield. It is similar to the man questioning Jesus. His inheritance...is another type of ‘windfall’ which comes as free gift.

The man in the parable is self-absorbed. What shall I do? He seems to be alone which is unusual. In Mediterranean culture everyone lives in the context of family and community. But it seems not so with this man. His concern is to set aside the abundance for himself...to ensure **his** needs for years to come...so he can 'relax, eat, drink and be merry'. He seems to have forgotten that the saying is 'Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you shall die.' God calls him a fool. Why?

He's a fool because he has not stored up treasure with God.

How might this parable have played out differently if the man had been 'rich toward God' and stored up his treasure with him? I wonder? Maybe the man would have been surrounded by a strong network of family and community relationships. Maybe he would have felt that his good fortune was also their good fortune. He would have realized that his barns didn't have **to store** the extra crops; that he didn't need to build new larger barns because he could **share** his abundant crop with his neighbours. He could have 'killed the fatted calf' and invited everyone to a celebration of 'Thanksgiving for God's grace'. He could have spent his last night on earth joyfully feasting and dancing; mindful, as the proverb says... that he would not be there forever.

But we live in a culture which is strongly focused on the material and in storing up for the future. Good stewardship of resources **is** responsible and desirable. But how do we avoid crossing the line to obsession with future security? How do we sidestep the widespread idolatry rampant around us where we strain and exert our best efforts for **personal gain**? We have 'insurance' we have investment 'securities' and 'assurance' companies, which focus on securing material security.

Many of us fondly remember a Canadian institution...Eaton's catalogue! How many of us remember poring over its pages closely as children as Christmas approached? I never tired of examining the dolls. How many rural people in remote areas would dream of owning various items made accessible on its pages? We loved the Eaton's catalogue and many found it useful in the outhouse when toilet paper rolls were a luxury.

And yet...how many of you have ever been to a dump and taken notice? Stoves and fridges, cars and TVs, computers, sofas lie discarded. These very items people

scrimped and saved for and paid for over months and years once so desirable. Yet here they are...no longer desirable, no longer worth struggling to pay for...why? because we now 'need' other 'things'.

The Romans had a proverb:

**"Money is like seawater; the more you drink the thirstier you become".**

Yet money, and the things which money secures, are a passion for many people. Howard Hughes made more than a billion dollars in his lifetime and J. Paul Getty made several billion. It was much more than either could possibly spend. Why the drive to pursue more money when they already had more than they could count, let alone spend?

Each of them became more and more unhappy as their wealth increased.

Please note that Jesus did not say that it is bad to have money. Bill and Melinda Gates use their money to fund medical research to eradicate malaria and other Third World diseases.

Andrew Carnegie used his wealth to start the public library movement in this country.

Alfred Nobel used his money to endow the Nobel Prizes -- to encourage excellence and to promote peace. God bless them!

John Wesley put it this way. He said:

"Do all the good you can  
By all the means you can  
In all the ways you can  
In all the places you can  
To all the people you can  
As long as ever you can."

We can do that whether we are rich or poor -- and, if we do that -- if we do all the good we can -- it won't matter whether or not we are rich.

But if we are fixated on accumulating wealth -- or things -- if our primary concern is SuperSizing our houses and cars and food portions, then we need to hear Jesus' warning.

We followers of Christ are in a different business; and our business is counter cultural. We are in the business of spiritual needs and spiritual assurance and soul

securities. We are in the business of amassing 'riches in God'. This amounts to first before anything, loving God and loving one another. This involves making those the things that matter and on which we focus our attention and energies.

Here is a parable found in a sermon written by Rev Ross Bartlett:

A very rich man died and left his inheritance equally to his two sons. Now one son had married young in life and had a large and happy family. The other was still a bachelor. The night after the division of the estate the single man sat thinking in his living room. "Why did my father make such a mistake? Here's my brother, with all those mouths to feed, so many to provide for and no real joy in it. While I'm quite comfortable, I've got more than I could ever use. Why divide the estate equally?"

The other brother, when the children were tucked in bed mused: "Why would my father divide the estate equally? Here I am, surrounded by a loving family and all that joy, while my brother sits alone in his house. I have my family to care for me, while he will need financial security for his future. Why divide the estate equally?" So each man, that very night, resolved to place the majority of his inheritance in a suitcase and take it over and hide it where the other brother would find it and use it. As they were doing just that, they met between their two homes and realizing what each had intended fell into one another's arms, meeting in love as their father had hoped they might.

Amen.

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