

Sermon: Where Is Your Treasure?
Text: Luke 12:13-34 NLT
God's Word: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 NLT
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens
Date: Sunday, August 7, 2022

Luke 12:13-34 NLT

¹³ Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." ¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" ¹⁵ Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."

¹⁶ Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. ¹⁷ He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. ¹⁹ And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"' ²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' ²¹ "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

²² Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. ²⁴ Look at the ravens. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! ²⁵ Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ²⁶ And if worry can't accomplish a little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things? ²⁷ "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ²⁸ And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? ²⁹ "And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. ³⁰ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. ³¹ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. ³² "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

³³ *“Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it.”* ³⁴ *Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.*

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Last week, my news feed had a survey question: "Should the government do more to help poor people of all races?" A recent news story stated that, according to a financial guru, 4 out of every 5 adults in America are living on the edge of financial ruin. And to attest to this fact, in our own community, if you were to stay at the church office for a week you would answer phone calls from people asking for help with their power bills and rent. You would get calls from folks wanting food from our small food pantry. And you might receive a call from people who are living in their cars and need help to pay for a motel for the night. Thank goodness in our community, we have an incredible resource in BORN. BORN is our clearinghouse where we send funds and they do the vesting of how those funds are distributed through utility bills, overnight housing, etc.

Side note: If anyone is interested in working with BORN or serving in any capacity, please see me after church.

The other day I was visiting someone at the hospital, and as I was traveling back down on the elevator I started making small talk with a woman who was also on the elevator. As we were parting, I told her that I hoped she had a nice day. And then she asked me, "Do you work here?" "No," I said, "I am a pastor." As soon as I said this, she motioned for me to come closer, and said she had something she needed to talk to me about. I knew what was coming. She needed financial help. Those are the kinds of times that I wish pastors made a lot more money!!! Anyhow, we are living in a time of great need. Of course, people have always lived in times of great need.

Throughout Luke's Gospel, it is made clear that one of the great themes of the Christian life or what it means to follow Jesus is the act of giving to the poor. For instance, when Mary sings praises to God for choosing her as the one who will give birth to the Savior of the world, Mary proclaims in Chapter 1: *"[God] has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed."* When Jesus announces His mission in Chapter 4 He says that He has come to *"preach good news to the poor."* In Luke 6 Jesus says, *"Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*

Luke is also the Gospel where Jesus tells the parable of "The Rich Man and Lazarus." Remember, Lazarus was a beggar, covered in sores who longed to eat even the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But the rich man ignored Lazarus. When they died, Lazarus was carried to Abraham's side whereas the rich man went to hell. We also have the story of "The Rich Young Ruler," Zacchaeus, and I could go on and on.

And so here we are this morning faced with the parable of the "Rich Fool," after which Jesus instructs us *"do not worry..."* And then in verse 33 He says, *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

In our Gospel Lesson for this morning, Jesus is teaching His disciples amid a crowd of thousands when an unnamed person interrupts Him with a demand. He asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide an inheritance with him. According to Jewish inheritance practices, an older brother would get 2/3's of an estate while the younger brother would get 1/3. And this brother wants Jesus to help him get his rightful possessions. And Jesus responds with, *"Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?"* And then Jesus issues an important warning to the crowd and to us: *"Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy."*

Then Jesus shoots right into the parable of the "Rich Fool." It should be noted that this rich man is not just some simple farmer with a small plot of land. Rather, he controls much of the agricultural produce over an entire region or district. Also, his bumper crop, should have been regarded as a generous blessing from God. Instead of a blessing, though, the rich man thinks of this huge harvest in terms of a problem.

*"He said to himself, 'What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest!'"* His barns are already bursting to overflowing--he must have had a good harvest the year before as well--poor guy!!! *"If only my barns were bigger!!!"*

His concern over having inadequate storage space indicates that he has no intention of either selling or sharing his crops. And as he's brooding about his situation--his dire straits, shall we say--suddenly a light bulb goes off in his head!!! *"I know what I'll do!!! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my goods. I'll say to myself, 'You have stored up plenty of goods, enough*

*for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink and enjoy yourself.' But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself? This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and are not rich toward God.'"*

Now, let's not go overboard here. Storing a "bumper crop" in and of itself is not automatically a bad thing. That is exactly what Joseph instructed Pharaoh to do before the drought came upon the land. I mean, even the Egyptian government, under the direction of God, took care of their poor!!!

But this particular rich guy is no Joseph, who wisely discerned the times and acted for the benefit of those in need. Rather this "Rich Fool" is focused completely on himself and no one else. And his selfish greed has implications for his community. In future times of scarcity, this guy will become even richer, as others will be dependent on him and the high prices he sets for his food. This guy is totally self-absorbed. He doesn't take others into account. And the contrast between the way God looks at things and the way this guy looks at things is quite stark.

And in many ways he experiences exactly what Jesus asked His disciples in Luke 9:25: *"What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"*

It's interesting, unlike Jesus' stories about the Good Samaritan, the lost sheep, and the Prodigal son--but alarmingly like the parables of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Ten Pounds, and the Wicked Tenants--this parable has no last-minute rescue that brings about a "happily ever after." *"This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God."*

So what does it mean to be rich toward God? Certainly it involves tithing to the church. Certainly it involves upholding the Church of Jesus Christ by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness. Certainly it involves putting people above possessions. Certainly it involves using our resources for the benefit of our neighbors in need, as the Good Samaritan did. It involves intentionally listening to Jesus' Words and obeying them. It consists of prayerfully trusting that God will provide for the needs of life, selling possessions and giving. But it also involves something much deeper, something much more intense.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 32: *"Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom."* *"Do not be afraid..."* Fear is the perception that we must focus on ourselves--me, myself and I. Fear gets in our

way of allowing God to work in our lives. Fear entails failing to let go of our anxieties over life. Fear is what motivates us to "get rich" by accumulating human treasure...and thus forgetting compassion and mercy for those in need. Fear fails to trust God's love for us. As it says in 1 John 4:18: *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear..."* God is Perfect Love!!!

And it is only through God that we are set free to live lives without fear, without anxiety...it is only through God that we are set free to be people of compassion, mercy and love. It is only through God that we are able to be cheerful and generous givers. It is only through God that we are able to get outside of "Me, myself and I" and be free to think about others!!!

There can be no doubt that the modern Western world is built on anxiety. We see it on the faces of people rushing to work. We see it even more as they travel home. The faces are weary, puzzled, living with the unanswered question as to what it all means.

This world thrives on people setting higher and higher economic goals for themselves so that they can worry all day and all year and their entire lives about whether they will reach them. Is this really the way we are supposed to live?

Jesus says to His disciples and Jesus says to us: *"Therefore, I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. There is more to life than food and clothing...Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?...Don't be afraid little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom. Where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also."*

It's all about our hearts, is it not? Jesus talked over and over again about what is in our hearts. He even said that the *"kingdom of God is within you or among you"* in Luke Chapter 17:21. And if the Kingdom of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, is within us and among us--well, what greater treasure could there possibly be? This is the only treasure which can bring us peace. This is the only treasure which can bring us meaning. This is the only treasure through which we can find rest for our souls!!! And this is the only treasure which enables us to be truly human. This is the only treasure which brings us rest, joy, merriment...Is God's Kingdom inside or within you?

Remember when Jesus said, *"The kingdom...is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found...and because of his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and*

*buys that field."?* The Kingdom of God is more important than anything else in the world...it is more valuable than all the money in the world!!! It's what makes life worth living...don't miss out on it!!!

*"Your Father delights in giving you the kingdom"*--have you accepted His free gift? Is your treasure in heaven? Peace, joy, security...only God offers that. *"Don't be afraid"* to trust in God. God *"delights in giving you the kingdom."* When you've got that, you've got it all.

Amen.