

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

7/31/22 (Proper 13, Year C)
Luke 12:13-21

Okay, this subject. Did you know that Jesus talks about money and possessions more than ANY other subject? He must think it's important.

And usually his parables kind of leave the lesson between the lines, so you need to think about it. But when he talks about possessions, he's VERY DIRECT. He goes right for the throat.

This subject must be important. It seems like, more than ANY other part of lives, our possessions can DISTRACT us from the life HE wants us to have. Our reading from Colossians even called greed "idolatry."

These last couple years have reminded us, sometimes very harshly, that life is a gift. It's a blessing from God. Everything we are, every person we love, everything we have is a blessing from God, a gift.

Now as Americans, we tend to get caught up in ONE aspect of that more than any other: we are EXTREMELY blessed MATERIALLY. As a country, we have more stuff than any other country in the world, that's EVER EXISTED.

We love our stuff. Just think about your own home. Most of us have so much stuff that we have to store some of it—in the closets, under the bed, in the guest bedroom, in the garage, in the basement, in the attic, in the shed out back, even in a storage unit we have to RENT.

All these THINGS are blessings, but Jesus gives us a warning: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

When you listen to the WAY Jesus tells the parable, there are a couple words that pop up again and again, that you hear the MOST in this story. I, I, my, I, I, my, I, my, my, I, my, over and over again.

The thinking in ancient Israel was that the harvest was a gift from God, and it belonged to EVERYONE, the WHOLE COMMUNITY. It was something to be CELEBRATED and SHARED. But this man receives a huge harvest, and all he can think about is HIMSELF. He fools himself into thinking that his material wealth can satisfy his SOUL. But Jesus explains that REAL and MEANINGFUL life is MORE than just possessions.

Douglas C. Means once said, "A life's worth, in the end, isn't measured in hours, or dollars. It's measured by the amount of love exchanged along the way." We don't help others because of what we can get in return; we help others because we CAN. A GOOD PERSON, a RIGHTEOUS person, can be defined as simply someone who recognizes that they HAVE something to offer, that they CAN do something to help another person, and DOES it.

Florence Ferrier tells a story about a social worker in poverty-stricken Appalachia. It's called "We Ain't Poor!" The author tells it in the first person.

The Sheldons were a large family in severe financial distress after a series of misfortunes. The help they received was not adequate, yet they managed their meager income with ingenuity – and without complaint.

One fall day I visited the Sheldons in the ramshackle rented house they lived in at the edge of the woods. Despite a painful physical handicap, Mr. Sheldon had shot and butchered a bear which strayed into their yard once too often. The meat had been processed into all the big canning jars they could find or swap for. There would be meat in their diet even during the worst of the winter when their fuel costs were high.

Mr. Sheldon offered me a jar of bear meat. I hesitated to accept it, but the giver met my unspoken resistance firmly. "Now you just have to take this. We want you to have it. We don't have much, that's a fact; but we ain't poor!"

I couldn't resist asking, "What's the difference?" His answer proved unforgettable.

"When you can give something AWAY, even when you don't HAVE much, then you ain't poor. When you don't feel EASY giving something away, even if you got more'n you NEED, THEN you're poor, whether you KNOW it or not."

(That has always stuck with me.) When I feel myself RESISTING an urge to share what's mine – or when I SEE someone sharing FREELY from the LITTLE he has – I remember Mr. Sheldon saying, "We ain't poor!"

YOU AIN'T POOR. What do YOU have to GIVE? What can you DO to HELP someone? Can you invite a friend to church? Can you WELCOME people to church? Can you sing? Can you bring a child to VBS? Can you volunteer to team teach children something you already love for a few Sundays of the year? Of COURSE you can. You DO have something to offer; you CAN help.

Now, Jesus doesn't SAY there's anything WRONG with possessions THEMSELVES. There isn't. The QUESTION is what we DO with them. Do we KEEP them, even if that means building new BARNs to keep them, and storing them away for years and years, for OURSELVES? Or do we USE them to HELP OTHERS?

For Jesus the choice is CLEAR. But for US, it's not so easy. We get a lot of SATISFACTION from having stuff. We all have this big, gaping hole right here in our hearts, and material stuff SEEMS really close to the size and shape of what's missing. And we try REALLY HARD to MAKE it fit, to STUFF our STUFF in there, but that hole is God-shaped, and God's the ONLY one that can fill it.

WHAT IS WEALTH ANYWAY? "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Better to put your trust in something that's sure. People will try to sell you ALL KINDS of things, calling them "sure things," but according to the Bible, there's only ONE thing in the whole WORLD that's SURE: the Kingdom of GOD. The only FUTURE that's sure is GOD'S future.

So put your faith, your time, and, yes, your money into things that last, things that will LIVE ON, even after you DIE. And if you want to know what THOSE things are, the truly IMPORTANT things in life, then just look AROUND you. What is REAL wealth? Your children, your family, your friends, your community, your church. These are the things that really matter, that live on AFTER us. These are the things God USES for the Kingdom.

There's a song I want to share with you. It's an old Bible camp song. It's called "I want it all."

Vs. 1: I want it all, I want it now, I want to live.
To make some sense; a difference, I want to give.
Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
and so — I want it all.

Vs. 2: I need it all, I need it now, I need to live.
To make some sense; a difference, I need to give.
Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
and so — I need it all.

Bridge: God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance. So that by having enough of everything, you may share abundantly.

Vs. 3: I have it all, I have it now, I have to live.
To make some sense; a difference, I have to give.
Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
and so — I have it all.

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We spend our whole lives reaching – wanting and needing it all – but we FORGET that in Christ we already HAVE it all. So, what's KEEPING us from offering, not just our possessions but, more IMPORTANTLY, offering our SELVES, offering our TIME and SKILLS to OTHERS and to GOD?

When it comes to the things that REALLY MATTER in life, God has provided you “every blessing in abundance.” “A life’s worth, in the end, isn’t MEASURED in hours, or dollars. It’s measured by the amount of LOVE exchanged along the way.” Amen.