

The Greed Trap
Dr. Frank Allen, Pastor
First Presbyterian Church, Kissimmee, Florida

July 21, 2016

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 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."

16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'

18 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. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

20 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?'

21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

HOARDERS

There are some people who save everything.
And there are a few who take it to an extreme.
They save so much that their whole house is filled with trash, and it becomes unlivable.

There's even a TV program about it.
I think they call it Hoarders.

I haven't watched it.

I've seen compulsive hoarding in real life, and it's not a pretty picture. For me watching others drown in their own stuff does not make a good show.

But, I'm sure there are many who do watch that show.

And I'm sure those viewers are amazed and horrified (and oddly attracted) by watching a show about people who are so messy and messed up.

And yet, I wonder if this is just an extreme example of something that is a problem for all of us. Hoarders, like alcoholics often don't know that they have a problem.

Could we be in the first stages of the same dread disease?

GREED IS A TRAP

Today's lesson begins with a man wanting Jesus to "tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him."

But, Jesus won't do it.

Jesus wants no part of this family squabble.

Jesus knows that this is a now win situation.

The struggle for possessions can tear families apart when they need to pull together.

So, Jesus said,

"I'm not a judge. This is not my decision.

But, one thing I do know. You better watch out!

The desire for other people's stuff can mess up your life big time.

"Life is more than having a lot of stuff."

Most of us would agree with that.

But, sometimes we don't act on that knowledge.

Greed has a way of creeping up on us.

Greed has a way of taking over our life before we even know it.

So, Jesus tells us,
“Be on your guard.”

The word translated “be on your guard” means literally to figure out a way to escape from a trap.

My friends, greed is a trap, and we are all susceptible.

We have to open our eyes and see what is really going on in our lives. We have to constantly examine our lives so that we won't be possessed by our possessions.

How do we do that?

What can open our eyes to what is really going on?

How can we escape this trap?

THE PARABLE

I suggest that we look at our own lives in the light of Jesus' parable. Ask yourself, “In what ways are we like the rich man in this parable?”

The parable goes like this:

“There was a rich man who had a bumper crop. In fact he had so much that he didn't have any place to store it. What should he do with the excess?”

The rich man asked himself (because himself was the person he loved and trusted the most),

“Self ... what should I do with all this stuff?”

One commentator noted that the ancient economy depended upon successful farmers selling and sharing their crop. The farmer's decision would impact a lot of people.

But, this rich farmer did not think about others. Instead, he said only to himself,

“I know. I'll build bigger barns so I can store it all.

I'll have plenty for many years to come.
And then I'll eat, drink and be merry."

He forgot about the second part of that saying ... "for tomorrow we die."

The rich farmer thought that he had it made.
But, there was one thing the man did not count on, He did not count on
God.

God interrupts the man's soliloquy and says,

"You fool. Tonight you're going to die.
So, what difference does it make that you have all this stuff?
It won't do you a bit of good."

Finally, Jesus gives us the moral of this story,
"So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich
toward God."

It was as if the rich man invested in the wrong company in the stock mar-
ket.

In the end he was left with nothing.
Greed is not good! Greed is foolish.

BIGGER BARNS AND FEAR

If we are to resist the lure of greed, we have to understand why the path of
greed is so tempting.

In our own way most of us want to build bigger barns.

Why do we do it?
What motivates us to build those bigger barns?

We want to secure our future by increasing what we own.

We build bigger barns out of fear.
We are afraid that we won't have enough in the future.

Oddly enough some of the most wealthy and ostentatious people in the
world are also the most fearful.

Now, of course, not having enough in the future is a real possibility. No matter how much we have sometimes it's not enough.

A setback can put any of us in financial difficulty no matter how much we have.

Many of us believe (myself included) that it's just prudent to put away something for a rainy day.

But, often we go too far.

We obsess so much about the rainy day that we don't give thanks and enjoy the sunshine of today. We obsess so much about what we don't have that we don't give thanks for what we do have.

The answer to fear and anxiety about the future ... is to be grateful *today*.

The answer to fear and anxiety about the future ... is to share what we have *today*.

The answer to fear and anxiety about the future is to build up trust and hope and love ... instead of always building bigger barns.

GIVING IT ALL AWAY

I have learned that people who are facing the fact of their own mortality often want to do one thing more than anything else.

Do you know what that is?

Do you know the one thing that people want to do more than anything else when the shadow of death comes into their life?

The want to give away what they have to the people they love.

They want to give away what they have to others who might need it more than they do.

They want to give so that their life might make a difference in the world.

Jesus, through the medium of this parable, wants to change our perspective.

He wants us to think about life from the perspective of our mortality.

It's not what we inherit in this world that makes us great. It's what we leave behind for others.

It's what we leave behind for others that makes us truly rich.

And more than that, it's what we leave behind for others that makes us rich toward God.

MONEY IN THE BIBLE

Did you know that the Bible has 500 verses on prayer, 200 verses on faith ... and 2000 verse on money? Obviously money is an important topic in the Bible.

Now some mistakenly believe that the Bible says that money is not the root of all evil.

The Bible actually says that “the *love of money* is the root of all kinds of evil.” And more than that, Paul says in his first letter to Timothy that some have actually “wandered away from the faith” because they loved money so much. (1 Timothy 6:10)

I heard a preacher say this week that the church spends a lot of time talking about what the Bible says very little about. And the church spends little time talking about what the Bible says a lot about.

I wonder. Could it be that our love of money has distorted our perspective and keeps us from really hearing what the Bible has to say?

In the gospel of Luke and also in the second volume that Luke penned, The Acts of the Apostles, a major theme emerges. And that theme is that importance of using our money and our possessions to help others.

When the early church shared what they had with others, the church grew by leaps and bounds.

Oddly enough many of the so called church growth experts miss this point. They talk about programs and music and preaching and how we worship.

All of those things are important of course.

But, the most important characteristic of that growing, Spirit formed church was that it was a church that shared. What is the defining characteristic of the church today?

Some of us are concerned that the church is not growing in our day ... at least not in this country. What can we do to make things different?

Maybe we should take a cue from the early church.

Maybe if we start to share ... not only our money but also our lives ... things would change. Instead of focusing on building bigger buildings, maybe the church needs to focus on building bigger hearts ... hearts that have room for all people.

Maybe that's what it means to be rich toward God.

FOOLISH SELF-TALK

Hoarding does not get us into the kingdom of heaven.
In fact hoarding often prevents us from really living this life to the fullest.

But, the worst thing about hoarding is that it separates us not only from our neighbor but also from God. We might have everything that this world has to offer, but if we are not right with God, if we are not rich toward God, then we have nothing.

God called the rich man a fool.
He wasn't a fool because he was rich.
He was a fool because he didn't know how to use his blessings.

He thought that building bigger barns was the most important thing he could do in life.
But, one word about mortality changed all that.
One word about mortality made all his planning useless.

Notice that all the action in today's parable occurs in one place. It occurs in the mind of the rich farmer.

This parable strongly suggests that that we monitor how we think about things.

When I was working as a psychologist, there was a particular therapy that focused on changing a person's way of thinking.

Sometimes we tell ourselves the most outrageous things. Sometimes we tell ourselves that we are bad, that we are unworthy of the respect of others.

We call ourselves terrible names.

And when we do that we respond accordingly.

We feel depressed and anxious. This therapy concentrated on changing that kind of negative self-talk.

In the same way, sometimes we tell ourselves that obtaining the object of our dreams will make us feel good.

You know what I mean.

If only we had that dream house, then things would be better.

If only we had that sports car, then we would be cool.

And in the case of the rich farmer,

"If only I had bigger barns, then I would be set for life. I could retire rich."

But, all of this is magical thinking.

A new car soon loses its luster.

A beautiful home also comes with more maintenance and a bigger tax bill.

And sometimes retirement, even a good retirement comes with great challenges as well as blessings.

Things just don't bring us the satisfaction we hope they will.

In fact, the pursuit of things becomes a vicious cycle that drain the joy out of life.

A CHANGE OF MIND

How can we prevent this from happening?

We are to change the way we think about things.

The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians,
 “Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth ...”
 (3:2)

In this same passage Paul goes on to say that greed is the same thing as idolatry. (3:5)

When we are greedy, we put ultimate trust in things that are here today and gone tomorrow.

We worship the pursuit of things instead of the one true God.

It’s a matter of priority.

If we focus entirely on the things of this world, then those things become a false god, and our life will become an endless and destructive pursuit of things.

If our minds are set on the kingdom of God, on doing God’s will, then the things of earth will fall into their proper place. They will once again become good gifts instead of being the instruments of our self-destruction.

The Bible tells us that when we give to others we store up treasure in heaven. (Luke 12:33)

A verse that we quote often says, “God so loved the world that he gave...”
 (John 3:16)

That’s what love does.

It gives.

Love doesn’t hoard.

Love gives.

LOVE AND GRACE

And there’s a reason love gives.

Love is based on grace.

The passage that follows this parable tells us not to be anxious, not to be fearful about our lives.

Consider the lilies of the field. They are more beautiful than King Solomon in all his glory. If God does that for the grass of the field, won't God take care of you as well?

Do we believe in the grace of God?

Do we believe that God can and will care for us all the days of our lives?

Do we believe the Creator God is also the Providential God, the God who graciously intervenes in the life of creation to uphold, sustain and ultimately save it?

If we believe these things, then there is no need to hoard our blessings. Blessings come from above.

And, ironically, the only way we can lose those blessings is to hang on to them too tightly.

It's like manna in the story of the Exodus.

You remember the story.

God fed his children manna from heaven as they wandered in the wilderness.

But, there was one thing you needed to know about manna.

You couldn't store it.

In fact, if you tried to keep manna for more than one day it would go bad. It would look like one of those science experiments that we occasionally create in our own fridge. You know what I mean.

What was the point of God giving his people bread that would only last a day?

It was to teach them to trust in God for the provision of their daily bread.

Hoarding spoiled the blessing.

Trusting made each an opportunity for a new miracle.

We talked about that last week.

One petition of the Lord's Prayer is:

"Give us this day our daily bread."

That short sentence is an expression of desire.

All of us have daily needs.

And all of us depend upon the grace of God for those needs.

But, that petition is also an expression of faith.

When we say, "Give us *this day* our daily bread" we are saying something about God.

We are saying that God can be trusted to give us what we need each day.

Why waste this day by worrying about tomorrow?

Each day is the day that the Lord has made.

Each day is a day to rejoice and be glad.

"In life and in death, we belong to God."

Is there anything else that we could want?

I don't think so.

We don't need anything more.

We are already rich toward God.

Amen.