

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13 – 21

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(transcribed from his sermon on Sunday July 31st, 2022)

Grace mercy and peace to you from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Today we have the parable of the rich fool from Luke chapter 12, verse 13 through 21. I encourage you to follow along in your Bibles and there are some questions for you to ponder on the back of the announcements.

Let's dive right in and look at what God's word has to say to us today. Here in Luke, Jesus tells this parable and it starts off pretty nice, don't you think? There's this man and he is rich and his land produces a great abundance. This sounds a lot like the parable of the talents where different servants are given different numbers of talents, a talent being a monetary sum worth, probably over a million dollars in today's money.

It was expected that the servants in that parable would see that large sum of money grow to an even larger sum of money that they were entrusted with. Here we have the rich man. He's given an abundance of crops. And what do you do with that? You invest it. You have to increase your storage capacity to maximize the amount that you can accumulate. If you don't have enough storage, then those excess crops aren't as lucrative or useful to you. So he builds silos. He stores up and has proper savings for the future. Everything we read about as being wise business practices. If you read through the book of Proverbs, look at what it has to say about savings and money.

Proverbs 21:5, "The plans of the diligent certainly lead to profit, but anyone who is reckless certainly becomes poor." This rich man, he was certainly diligent in his saving and his planning. Proverbs 21, 20, "Precious treasure and oil are in the dwelling of a wise person, but a fool consumes them." The commodities are stored by the rich man. They're not consumed in lavishness. This rich man is storing for the future. He's preparing rather than taking his abundance and just throwing some huge party because he has an abundance of crop. Finally, Proverbs 10:4-5, "Idle hands, make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches. The son who gathers during summer is prudent. The one son who sleeps during the harvest is disgraceful." This rich man was active in securing and expanding his wealth. He didn't sit idly. He took action for the future.

Now you hopefully have the point. Save wisely, live appropriately, and be prudent and diligent in your dealings. This is wisdom in action. Amen. May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. Well, that was a record all timer. So since we have a little bit of time, I need your help.

I would like to actually take this moment to go off topic a little bit and I need some tips from you all. I know some of you are skilled in this sort of thing on home improvement. Now, I'm still new to being a homeowner, so I've got questions. The other day, I was trying to hang some pictures, not the epic war pictures that I wanted to hang, but hang flowers. I was trying to nail a nail into the wall and I hit a hole in the wall. Now where I hit the hole, it was a little bit squishy. I thought that was kind of odd, so I looked inside and there was this kind of black substance, a little moist inside. I tasted it. It tasted terrible. Now, I don't know much, but I Googled it and I think that this is black mold. So, my question is, how am I going to get it out?

I've got ideas. My first idea is that I get like a spray water bottle that I use to spray the cat. I'm thinking maybe put some bleach in there, spray it all around, cover it up with drywall and we're good. Good idea? Yeah, Rachell didn't think so either. Okay, so next idea. I think this one's the solution. I'm thinking we cut a hole at the top of the wall, just pour bleach down the whole wall. Then, you know, you don't want to leave that there like that, so then you get a garden hose, run that from the outside, rinse off all the bleach. Then you don't want to obviously leave water in the wall, so then you cut a hole at the bottom, shopvac out all the liquid, patch it up, call it good? I'm getting a lot of head shakes "no." Okay. Final idea. Don't make something a problem that isn't one. I think you can just put some saran wrap over that hole. Kind of, maybe, seal it in. Drywall over the whole thing. That will, maybe, add some structural support and if there's any squishy or damp parts, kind of cover those up, going to keep the mold from getting in the air and just kind of wait and see what happens. You can always add more layers of drywall later, right? I'm getting laughter as if this is a bad idea. I'm getting you think that I have bad ideas.

Now you should know. My mother actually has experience in this. She was doing a renovation and put a hole in a wall and noticed that there was black mold inside it. So they had to open up the whole wall to see what was going on. And the whole wall was completely covered in black mold. What did they do? They gutted and replaced the entire wall. That's the thing with black mold in your house. You can't just replace some of the drywall or just pour some bleach and some water on it. You can't do it piecemeal. You have to gut the whole thing. All the drywall, all the insulation; it has to go. It's bad for the house and it's bad for your health. You have no choice, but to open the whole thing up, examine the damage, cut it out and replace it.

This brothers and sisters, is our parable today;†The parable of the rich fool. In our parable, the man did all the right actions. He did everything according to biblical principles of stewardship and the resources that he had been given, even as we saw from looking at the Proverbs.

So, what was the problem? The problem was that on the inside was rot. The inside of the rich man was dead and decaying. The man's heart was not turned towards God. He was a fool. His actions were focused solely on himself and not the one on who had imparted all of these things to him, God. Now, we get the pleasant opportunity to dig inside our own selves and assess our own damage.

We get to let the word of God about possessions, money and wealth be our guide. Jesus says in this passage, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. He also says a fool is one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Let's use that as our lens and let's do the painful. Let's look inside ourselves and assess the damage. I know I'm talking about something that makes us all really uncomfortable; money and possessions. Defense shields are already up. I know it. I'm not like that, Pastor. This message is for the person sitting next to me, not me.

No, it's not. Sadly this message is for you and it's for me as well. It's uncomfortable, but we have to assess the damage and cut out the rot. Let's talk about wealth. Just about every single one of us in this congregation is wealthy. Granted, there is a vast range of what that wealth is even within this congregation, but in the grand scheme of things, perspective wise, we are rather wealthy. Consider just a few points.

Many of you, I may even say most of you have in your pockets or purses, a little device, that has the ability to do thousands upon thousands of functions and commands. If you tried to duplicate the number of functions and commands that your phone could do, even from just a few decades ago, you would've had to have purchased dozens upon dozens of devices and spend tens of thousands of dollars.

Many of the functions your phone can do didn't even exist decades ago. You have vast telecommunication ability right in your pocket. You have the ability to speak to people all over the world. I can pick up the phone and talk to my brother in Guam, 16 hours away, on the other side of the world. You have camera technology that is better than the most expensive cameras for the early history of cameras. You have advanced calculator options. You have data spreadsheets. You can watch movies at the touch of a button. You can play board games and card games. You have maps all over the world of places that you can follow in real time. And that's just your phone that many of us have. How many of you have a car or lease a car, have a roof over your head? Eat food every single day? Have electrical access and clean water? The list goes on and on. I know you're saying Pastor, you're just trying to make us feel bad. I'm not going to be guilty for having basic necessities. That's not my goal at all. My goal is to just simply try and give us a little bit of perspective.

These things that we have, that we take for granted were not able to be taken for granted for most of the history of human existence and in many places of the world right now. We are in a period of unprecedented wealth. Here's another example on this one. This one just gets me, because it's just bonkers when you think about it. It should blow our minds. When you call something boring or plain or simple, what term do we use? Vanilla. Oh, you want just plain, boring ice cream? You're going to go to Braums and get vanilla? That's boring. What do you think about that guy's personality we just met? I don't know. He's pretty vanilla to me. Vanilla means boring or plain.

Stop to think about that. Vanilla, which is a flavor produced by seeds of tropical orchids, only grown in certain areas of the world, which take years to come to fruition and is one of the most expensive spices in the world. That is boring to us. What hubris. Historically, the spices that you can just walk into Walmart right now for a handful of dollars, pick up is an embarrassment of riches. You can get peppercorn, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, red pepper flakes, whole cloves, nutmeg, turmeric, ginger, thyme, basil, dill. The list goes on.

You can have them all right at your hand. Royalty of days gone by would've fought wars to get their hands on such spices and seasonings. And it's all just right there in the aisle. For our pleasure, you can go on to Amazon and buy some silk pajamas. They have wars called silk wars. For \$25, silk pajamas, and you can grab a bowl of plain, old vanilla ice cream, of which you have the refrigeration capabilities to store, and sit on a couch and watch a movie.

We call that just a plain boring day at home. That is major wealth. For many of us it's just boring. Let's keep peeling back the layers even further. What of the things that you have are you really attached to? What of the things, aside from life saving medicines of which is itself a blessing, can you just not live without?

For me, I don't ever go anywhere without my wallet, my keys and my phone. Got to have those. Those are essentials to me. I think about them and I use them a lot. I also love trinkets. Rachell hates this fact, but it's true. I love little trinkets. If I got rid of all my trinkets, I would feel a need to start collecting more little trinkets. I would actively replace them. It's basically a need at that point when I feel like I have to replace something like that. My question is, what is your attitude towards the things that you are attached to? What is your attitude towards how you have acquired them?

Is your retirement, your pension, your salary, your 401k, your stock holdings, your real estate, your finances, your possessions, your collections, your peace and security for the future that you have lined up, all a result of your talent, your hard work and skill? You get to pat yourself on the back for them?

Or are they all, and I do mean all, purely yours to have and work with because God, the almighty entrusted them to you and the talents and the work and the skill that you put into getting them, themselves, a gift from God? I encourage you to really dig deep on this and think about your attitude toward that. Of course the irony of all of this is that even though we are so attached to our stuff that we have and our accomplishments and everything that we have and everything that we work for, it's all just vanity in the end.

That's our Old Testament reading. It's all just vanity. We can't take anything that we build or acquire with us. As the saying goes, you will never see a U-Haul following a hearse. You can't take it with you. Here's even a little secular wisdom for you to think about. See if you recognize this one.

I close my eyes only for a moment and the moment's gone. All my dreams pass before my eyes, a curiosity. Dust in the wind. All they are is dust in the wind. Same old song, just a drop of water in an endless sea. All we do crumbles to the ground though we refuse to see. Dust in the wind. All we are is dust in the wind. Now don't hang on. Nothing lasts forever, but the earth and sky.

Now I have to pause on that part.

That's just theologically incorrect. Even the earth and sky will pass away. All things pass away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

[singing] It slips away and all your money won't another minute buy. Dust in the wind. All we are is dust in the wind.

Now the lead singer on that had a whole band supporting him on back up there and you guys gave me nothing. That song was actually inspired by our Ecclesiastes reading today. Dust in the Wind from Kansas. It works pretty well with our Lenten and funeral liturgies. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. You are dust and to dust you shall return. Every single one of us must look inside with the mirror of the law and see the rot in our heart and the vanity and decay of it all.

The solution? Like black mold – just rip it out of there. Throw it all out and receive the new heart that Jesus has given you. As you're sitting here; dead and decaying spiritually from the inside, Jesus rips out the old. He takes it into himself and he gives you a new heart. The old one, he crucifies to the cross and he raises you again to new life just as he was raised again to new life on the third day. That is the gospel for you. That if it was up to us to fix this corrupted and broken heart, we would have no hope. It would all just be dust in the wind. Rot and decay, vanity of vanities, utterly hopeless. Instead, we as Christians have the utmost hope and a future because of Christ and only because of Christ. He saves you not just from the vanity of this life; he saves you from yourself and the decay that we have nurtured. In Christ we have a new heart, a heart that's not attached to money or possessions that instead focuses outward toward God and toward our neighbor.

This brothers and sisters, is why tithing is so important. Bet you didn't expect me to go there, did you? Not because we earn favor with God with tithing. Let me be very clear. Not because we earn favor with God by tithing and not because we earn favor with anyone else, but because it's good for the new heart to do. If you have a heart transplant, you don't turn around and immediately start abusing it with drugs and other unhealthy things. You care for it because it's precious new life you've been given. As you who have been given a new eternal heart – salvation, your sins are forgiven. You cast away the old ways and you live according to God's word. Tithing is important because it goes directly against our attachment to, and love and reliance on, this world and turns instead our focus towards God and trust.

There it is. First he attacks our wealth. Now he is asking us for money. I see right through you Pastor. The truth is I don't want your money, but God does. That's just the reality. I will gladly

admit that these are uncomfortable sermons to preach and hear. I'm preaching at myself first and foremost, knowing the attachments to things that I have.

Those things that hit closest to our hearts are the hardest to hear about. We have to talk about these things in the church. Yes, this church and the school need money to run and tithing is what makes that possible. But in this sermon (for all those on the finance committee don't listen to this part) I don't care about that. I don't care about funding the church or funding the school. I mean, I do care about that. But right here, and right now, what I care about is that tithing is important because it's good for your heart. I don't know what a single one of you gives or doesn't give. I don't know any of those numbers. This isn't about any of that.

This is simply about fostering an attitude that says, God, none of this is mine. It is all yours, anyway, everything I have, all that I am and we simply return to you what is your own. Now, some of us want to be better at tithing, but we don't know where to start. If you want some help. Here is just one possible example forward.

Rachell and I give 10% of every single paycheck we get right off the top. That's not meant as a brag. In fact, you could even say that that's a confession before each of you, because we could do better than that. This is just one example to consider if you're someone that needs help starting that journey. We give 10% right up the top straight to the church. Not leftovers. It's the first fruits. It's not only when we're able. It's first and foremost as a trust in God and as a thanksgiving to him. And 10% has a good Biblical precedent. Then any additional things that we want to support, individual projects or efforts or anything like that is in addition to that. Now, that's just an example of where we could start. An example of us trying to be generous or rich toward God as our reading says. Which really was the best joke that I've told today. And not one of you laughed.

That we could be generous to God. It's just comical. You have been given everything. We sinfully cling to all that we have. We think that we can somehow with that, that we have, be generous to God. You can't out generous. God. You can't out give God, he's given us everything.

Anything that we have is simply but a return to him for what he's entrusted to us. He has given you life and salvation, not as something to be earned, but as a completely free gift, Jesus Christ given for you on the cross. All we have, all our life and all of us should be dedicated toward God in trust and thanksgiving because of what Christ has done for us.

So let's conclude this morning and sum up what we've talked about. You've been given everything. We cling to that which we've been given rather than to the one that gives it to us. Our hearts are corrupted and covetous. We rely on the works of our hands and the things of this world. But Jesus, he kills your old self and he brings the new to life. He gives you a new heart and in turn, we turn our focus toward God and toward our neighbor. God has given you everything. In response, we simply give it back to him and to our neighbor with open hands. You

never know when your last day might be. You never know when you'll be called to eternity and you can't take any of it with you.

Put it all in service to God in Jesus' name. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.