

**Luke 12:13-21**

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” <sup>15</sup>Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

<sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ <sup>18</sup>“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.””

<sup>20</sup>“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ <sup>21</sup>“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

Dear children of God who are eternally rich in Jesus our Lord,

Economists tell us there have been many economic downturns during the last 100 years. The one we are in now has been rated one of the most severe touching just about everyone through job losses, pay cuts, depressed home values, shrunken stock portfolios – and anxiety about all of the above.

Now I’m pretty sure every one of us could talk about how the economy has affected ourselves and people we know, but that is not what you came to Church to hear. We came to Church to hear how our Lord and Savior has blessed us no matter what the economy around us looks like. We have come to Church to talk about riches, but we are not talking just about earthly riches. We have come to Church to be reminded that:

**Theme: We Are Rich!**

- 1. Our material riches are easiest to see**
- 2. Our spiritual riches are far more important**

Jesus tells us a parable - a spiritual story. And in this parable, he gets to the heart of this issue. When he tells us of the successful farmer - who was a spiritual bust - he teaches us the difference between spiritual riches and material riches. We aren’t exactly sure when Jesus told this parable in his ministry. We do know the setting, however. Jesus was teaching his disciples, when someone burst in from the crowd and asked Jesus for a favor. **“Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”** This nameless person was convinced that he had received the short end of the stick when it came to dividing up dad’s money. Jesus wasn’t interested, however, in being this man’s Judge: **‘Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?’** Jesus wasn’t so much interested in this man’s wealth, because Jesus was more interested in this man’s spiritual health. Jesus saw this man’s heart. Jesus saw Greed not God sitting in the driver’s seat. Jesus warns: **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possession.”**

A man’s life does not hinge on the abundance of his possession. Riches do not necessarily make a man rich. Don’t take my word for it. Take Jesus’ Word for it: **“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for**

**many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.’”**

Let’s take a good hard look at the cold hard truth. As we look at the outward appearance of this successful man, we don’t see any problems. He made his money the good old fashioned way. He earned it. He took the risks in planting that farmers have to take. He put in long hours. When he saw that a bumper crop was about to come in, he wisely undertook a massive barn expansion project. From the outside, it might even look like this man was practicing wise stewardship! We would even commend him for saving up for a rainy day. Jesus is telling us this parable to help us combat greed, yet we don’t hear of this man being dishonest in the least. He doesn’t stiff his hired hands. He doesn’t look greedy. But on the inside, the cancer of greed was eating him alive! His grain and his gold - not God - was #1 in his heart!

It is easy for us to think the same thing, when we were rolling in the money. It is easy to be obsessed by bigger houses, better boats, and more frequent flyer miles. It is easy to lose track of what is important as we want more and more. If that car with a V-6 impressed us, it isn’t long before we want the V-8 Limited Edition instead. But God tells us to be careful, **“a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”**

Let this all be a sobering reminder to you and me. With his hard-earned wealth, all the man wanted to do was take it easy and enjoy the finer things in life. (Which sounds about as American as apple pie and Chevrolet!) But did you notice what was missing? Where was the Lord in all of the decisions the man made? Wasn’t it the Lord who sent the rain showers to produce the bumper crop? Wasn’t it the Lord that gave the farmer his brains? Wasn’t it the Lord who gave the man his ability and strength to do his work? Where was the man’s “Thanks be to God!”? Where is the praise for God’s goodness? Where is the desire to use some of this bumper crop for the Lord’s work? We don’t hear of the Lord - period. The man’s big barns and the man’s big lazy boy recliner had become his Lord and God. When the Lord God called for the man’s life, he became the poorest of the poor. In the end, the man’s riches were nothing but rags. Pity the poor person that stands before the judgment seat of God clothed in dollar bills!

The rich farmer thought he was wise. God called him a Fool! The rich man thought he had years and years of life on easy street coming his way. He didn’t. In reality, he didn’t live through the first night of his retirement. The man thought that he had prepared a nice sized nest egg for himself. The fact of the matter? His big nest egg went to others who didn’t work for it! Jesus’ lesson is simple: If you are living for the things of this life, then every day you live is one day closer to the day when you will lose everything.

When we hear Jesus’ words, we also need to realize that he was speaking to us. He was saying, “Watch out, people of St. Luke’s! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” Jesus wants us to walk through the “full spiritual heart scanner” of God’s condemning Law (much like the full body scanner now found at the airports) and see what horrible things show up. In plain view for God to see there is all too often the horrible monster of Greed clear as day. This monster of Greed takes on many different shapes. It appears as a “Bah-Humbug-Scrooge” who finds little or no joy in the privilege of supporting God’s work and only thinks that the Church wants more and more of his money. He only finds joy in making sure he’s taken care of. So he refuses to be generous in giving back to God what is his! The monster of Greed takes the shape of another monster called “Jealousy.” Jealousy looks with hate and envy at those who are smarter, skinnier, healthier, wealthier—you know, the one who “has it all.” Greed takes the shape of yet another monster called “Worry,” who cries out, “Oh, my debts! Oh, my bills! How can God expect anymore from me?” Greed also takes the shape of still another monster called “Pride.” He looks down at the less fortunate, sticks out his chest, lifts up his chin and says, “I’m somebody. At least, I made something of myself and looks down on those who are beneath him in wealth, honor and prestige.”

Jesus says, “Scan your hearts for Greed and don’t let him make a fool of you. Don’t let him foolishly lead you to commit the idol worship of meeting spiritual needs with material things.” If you’re like me, maybe here’s where you feel like getting lost in the crowd. Perhaps, you too can open your checkbook register and see times when the things of God ended up beneath all the bills and frills. What a terrifying sight that is! On one side stood our God, who gave us everything in that check book. He even gave us

something indescribable: his own Son! And for that said, “Serve and honor me!” On the other side stood our greedy heart saying, “Serve and honor me!” Perhaps, you’ve looked into your full closets and full pantries with discontent. “I’ve got nothing to wear! We’ve got nothing in this house to eat!” And who of us hasn’t worried about something in this life, showing a weak trust that in Jesus God is our Father? Or who of us hasn’t lost our perspective at times? Who hasn’t gotten in a tizzy about some earthly matter, as if our purpose and joy is not in slaving for the cause of Christ, so that many friends join us in glory, but slaving for a 10 to 15-year period called “retirement,” so that we have plenty to leave behind?

When we consider the terrifying application Jesus makes from his parable, **“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”** we know that left up to us we could only live empty and afraid. But then our dear Jesus comes! He makes sure we never have to live one moment empty or afraid! He listens as we ask, “Teacher, how does someone become “rich toward God?” He draws for us a circle. This one has name over it: Jesus is our Savior. He scoops us up and drops us in that circle. In the circle with him he says, “One drop of my blood is worth more than heaven and earth combined. I spilled my blood for you. To me you’re worth even more than heaven and earth! By my flawless life and spotless sacrifice I washed away the slimy grime of guilt left by your greed. If you could only see the joy you bring to God now! All is well with your soul! It is safe now and forever! By being buried and resurrected with me through faith, you will be what I made you to be: a holy priest of the Most High God whose life is a sweet-smelling sacrifice of thanks. In me you will experience the joy I have in the presence of God and of saints and angels.

So if money isn’t for merely accumulating to accumulate, and it’s not for earthly happiness, and it’s not even for securing our futures – recession or not – then what exactly is it for? Well, maybe we need to rework the parable we just heard to help us see what it means to **“be rich toward God.”**

The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought, “How wonderful! God’s given such a harvest that it would fill my barns many times over. I wonder why?” So he talked with his friends and neighbors and people at his church. Then after thinking about it and praying about it, he said, “This is what I’ll do. Out of thanks to my God who has given me everything, I’ll use what God’s given me to do what he wants done. The first thing I’m going to do is give my offerings to God as I always have done, based on a percentage of what he’s given me. I know it will be used to support the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus. Then I’m going to fill my barns, so that my family is provided for and I am able to meet my obligations. Then I’m going to put some in my neighbor’s barn, it sounds like they could really use the help this year. I’m also going to invest in a reputable institution or two in my community that positively impacts people’s lives – maybe my alma matter, maybe that homeless shelter. If there’s still some left, I’ll do more of what God wants done. If it’s gone, then I’ll do it all over again next year in proportion to the crops God grants me.” And that’s exactly what the man did. God said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant.

We at St. Luke’s have been blessed beyond belief, both materially and spiritually. Our barns are overflowing with God’s goodness and blessings. We have facilities and a congregation full of love and a desire to serve their Lord and Savior. As we move forward into this next phase of our congregation -- Rooted in Christ – Growing in Love, I pray that we will be led to support the ministry which is before us. Whether we come into a fortune or live paycheck-to-paycheck, our lives are rich as we let God’s Word guide our use and attitudes toward money: Jesus first, everything else in a responsible, loving order. We are certainly rich in so many ways. May God’s love and power lead us to use all these things to thank and praise our great and wonderful God and Savior. Amen