



## WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

July 31, 2016, The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

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*O Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, and strength to follow on the path you set before us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Steve Jobs said, “Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn’t matter to me. Going to bed at night saying we’ve done something wonderful, that’s what matters to me.” That’s similar to what Jesus was getting at. Later on in this chapter of Luke, after the passage that Margaret just read for us, Jesus continues on and says, “strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

This parable is not necessarily about money. Rather it appears that Jesus is very specifically “warning us against greed. About the insatiable feeling of never having enough. And the parable he tells, illustrates this. The farmer’s problem isn’t that he’s had a great harvest, or that he’s rich, or that he wants to plan for the future. The farmer’s problem is that his good fortune has curved his vision so that everything he sees starts and ends with himself.” (David Lose)

A few weeks ago I heard a story about an interview about people’s resources and how much money they would need in order to make them “feel comfortable” or “feel secure” in this life. Each of them answered the question doubling exactly what they had. The person with \$100,000 said that it would take another \$100,000 to make them feel secure and the person with \$250,000 said another \$250,000 and the person with a million dollars said another million would put them at ease. The



more one makes, the more one thinks they need. That is not greed but it is perhaps the type of thing that can lead to greed.

Another thing I heard was a question put to a billionaire about if he felt like he had enough money and wealth and his answer was, “well, a billion dollars isn’t what it used to be.” Insatiable.

I, I, I, me, me, me. That is what Jesus is warning about. In Jesus’ parable the guy uses pronouns and language directed only toward and about himself. At one point he literally even speaks to his own soul. This man can only think and look inwardly. Not once does he refer to anyone outside of himself. Where is his neighbor? Where is God?

We are reminded of when the scribes had asked Jesus which was the first and most important commandment, and He said, *“The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;’<sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’<sup>31</sup> The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

This man missed the boat. He thought only about himself and of his “things.” He did not consult with God or his neighbor about what he ought to do with his blessing, he only looked to himself, hoarded it all. He did not check to see if he could help feed others who had no food. He took all of his grain and his goods and went and played by himself.

Warren Buffet once said, “Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” The man in this parable didn’t plant any trees. He did the opposite.

I think what this parable is trying to get at is that none of the things that we have are ours to begin with. God has blessed us all with what we have. They are our things on borrowed time and what we do with them is what matters. Do we give



more than we take? Do we take with thought of the other? God gave us each and every one of our little miracles, but what do we do with them? Do we make more miracles or do we hoard them for ourselves?

You see, it's not ours. It's all God's. It always has been and always will be. God has given us these things, these resources, these talents to make more talents and we are called to be stewards of them.

I don't know if this following story is true, but I remember being on a men's retreat, back when I worked for AIG, and hearing a story about Warren Buffet. The person telling the story said that when Warren Buffet found God he started to give some of his money away. And that as he started to give his money away, more and more money came in. He couldn't give it away fast enough. The more he dished out, the more that came in and at an even faster rate than he could give. Warren Buffet said something along the lines of, "I have a really big shovel but God's got an even bigger shovel!" That's the stuff. That's the story. That's the main point, the rub, and that's the spin, you see.

That's quite different than the message my wife, Holly, and I saw the other day. On Monday morning Holly and I were driving back from Montauk, having done a wedding at the Bourne Mansion there on Sunday night. While we were driving down route 495 on our way back to the city, a guy flew by us on the highway in a shiny T-top convertible with a license plate that said, "GETMONEY." My guess is that gentleman has an insatiable urge to make as much money as he possibly can. And to do so without regard for the other. To just think of himself. Of me, me, me, I, I, I, more, more, more....

On the other hand, there is Bill Gates' mother, Mary, who wrote a letter to Melinda for her to have on Bill and Melinda's wedding day. Mary was dying of cancer at the time and wanted nothing more than to continue to teach and instill the important things in life to her son and to her new daughter. She concluded her letter saying, "From those to whom much is given, much is expected." That's what



Jesus was saying over 2,000 years ago. That's what He was teaching everyone then and what He wants us to hear now.

How much time do we focus on securing our future? On earthly things. Specifically, on material wealth. How much do we think of I and me, rather than her and him? And how much of our lives is really spent focused on God and on doing God's will?

How often do we think of our neighbor and what we can do for them? And when was the last time we did a day of service for no other reason than to simply help people, to do what God calls us to do. Not because of any ulterior motive, and not because a friend invited us, or, for some of our younger members in the church, because it fulfills community service hours for school, but because we truly wanted to help, to make a difference, to "store up treasures in heaven."

When you wake up in the morning what is the first think we think about? Is it me, me, me, I, I, I? Or, is it what can I do to change the world today? What is God calling me to do? How can I be different, love different, act different, help different, think of God and others first?

When I was in seminary, I completed a dual degree program there. I simultaneously received a Masters of Divinity and a Masters in Youth Ministry. The second degree led to lots of study on the psychological development of youth and adolescence. And while studying these types of things, I will never forget reading a book about Millennials entitled "Generation Me." In it, Dr. Jean Twenge explores why the young people she calls "Generation Me" are tolerant, confident, open-minded, and ambitious – but also disengaged, narcissistic, distrustful and anxious. Before we all start nodding in agreement about Millennials, let me remind us that the term was actually one used first for the Baby Boomer Generation, or rather the "Me" Generation. So let us not judge other generations but rather see the world we are all living in now TOGETHER.



In another study in *Time* magazine we are told that, “The incidence of narcissistic personality disorder is nearly three times as high for people in their 20s as for the generation that’s now 65 or older, according to the National Institutes of Health; 58% more college students scored higher on a narcissism scale in 2009 than in 1982.” That’s what Jesus was preaching against. That’s the type of mentality we need to steer our children, ourselves and our world away from. Away from the insatiable. The I, I, I, me, me, me. We need to flip it to who can we help, how can we help, back to sharing and caring.

Catherine Caimano, an Episcopal minister, said, “Storing up our treasures is fine as far as it goes, but our real value as Christians is what we risk living into our faith. When we are rich towards God. And as far as I can tell, as Christians this involves some very specific tasks: loving God and loving one another above all. But also forgiveness, generosity, gentleness and hospitality. And not just believing in these things, but living them. Incorporating them into our work and our play, our learning and our rest, our family and our friendships....” Another thing that she said that I love so much is, “The only real world is the kingdom of God.”

Caimano is reminding us that it is like that dream I have every once and a while and that I hate so much. It’s that dream when you are back in school and all of a sudden it’s finals time. And then there is that one course. The one class you never even knew you were registered for. The one that you never attended but all of a sudden you have become very much aware of, and you have mere hours to prepare for the final exam. And it’s do or die. It’s make or break.

Are we ready? Are we living here on earth as if it were the kingdom of God? Or are we hoarding our mini-miracles all to ourselves insatiably? Not thinking of the other, not remembering that they were all God’s to begin with, still are and always will be.

The Reverend Anjel Scarborough wrote, “In the face of the stark reality of death, the truth is revealed: No amount of wealth or possessions can save you from your own finitude. You will die, and nothing on this earth can prevent death. Your



possessions are temporal and are not of ultimate worth. They will not save you... When our focus moves outward in this way, we begin to view our wealth very differently. First, we realize that it isn't our wealth at all – it all belongs to God. Not only has our wealth come from God, even our own talents by which we are able to obtain our wealth are gifts from God. None of it belongs to us – it's all on loan.”

So let us all be reminded of this today and each and every day. Let us all go out into the world and live like it. To live like we have been changed. To live like we are different. Because Jesus told us to live differently and to think of others first. To not always be looking inward but to also be looking outward, to the world around us. To share our wealth and our blessings and to share God's love with others.

*In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.*