

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 12:13-21

¹³ 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 towards God.' This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

This is the word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO GOD.

FIRST READING: Psalm 107:1-9,43

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. ² Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, ³ those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. ⁴ Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. ⁵ They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. ⁶ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. ⁸ Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, ⁹ for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things....Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

This is the word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO GOD.

“Beyond ‘My’”

Jesuit priest, John Haughey, once said, *“We read the Gospel as if we had no money, and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel.”*¹ It is a very appropriate statement for Christians like us to consider because we KNOW we are subject to the pressures of living in an a very materialistic culture, but also because we are subject right now to financially a very unstable and concerning time, a time where, despite low unemployment rates, costs are rising, the market has plummeted and recession is threatening. So, we struggle between doing what we KNOW we should do from the Gospel and succumbing to the pressures and fears of our time and place. The statement by Priest John Haughey just so happens to also be a pretty good one to begin our study from Luke today, a text that speaks to how faithful people should handle their money and possessions. *“We read the Gospel as if we had no money, and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel.”*

Luke is certainly not the only place that the importance of how faithful people need handle money and possessions is addressed. No, God’s word speaks often of the subject, throughout the entirety of the Bible. It’s such an important and frequently discussed subject that it’s been given a name, the “odd economics of God.”² The odd economics of God, something that the man who interrupted Jesus should have known, had he studied his scripture. Nevertheless, he interrupted, *“Teacher, TELL my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”*

Jesus responded by FIRST providing the punch line of the lesson he was about to teach. *“Pay attention! Guard yourself against all kind of greed,”* he told him, *“for one’s life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”* Then Jesus told a parable, a parable about a landowner who did not actually seem to be a bad man. Jesus gave no hint that he, who did not have enough room in his current barns to store his prolific harvest, had done anything illegal. He’d not acquired his wealth illicitly nor had he exploited his hired hands. The only thing was that his land produced abundantly. His land had produced abundantly, and the landowner was struggling with how to

¹John Haughey. *“Living Pulpit”*. Apr-June: 2002; 14. Quoted in Kirshner, S. *“Give, Grow, Become!”* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/101815>. (accessed 7-28-22)

²Barbara Lundblad. *“Beyond Myself”* <https://asermonforeverysunday.com/sermons/c36-the-eighth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-2019/> (accessed 7-29-22).²

store the excess. Some in the crowd may have actually been thinking as Jesus spoke, “*God has surely blessed this man! He must be very devout!*”

But as Jesus went on, we can see the hint of trouble present. The man talks to himself, asking himself question after question and answering them too. It seems a little funny at first...some of us can identify...however when we realize that he’s doing this because he doesn’t have anyone else to speak to, it’s a little sad. The landowner is living his life in great isolation. Rev. Shannon Kirchner and other scholars suggest that the landowner had so completely ingested his culture’s dominant narrative of acquisition at all cost that he had nothing and no-one else. His primary purpose to get more and more and more, to build more barns when he had come into surprising abundance, had become such a focus that he had become the center of his own world.³

Indeed, it is true that when one is constantly focused on buying, buying, buying, selling, selling, selling, buying, buying, buying, at some point you no longer know how to have a relationship with anything else but your product. Your hands become clenched so tight that they no longer know how to open up. *There’s an old story that I’ve told some of you before about a hunter who once observed an eagle landing on an ice-crusted limb, floating in a river. From that vantage point the bird could undoubtedly observe the best fish. But the river was rushing toward a waterfall. At any moment the eagle could have turned loose of the icy perch and soared away into the blue sky. But it did not. It did not. It stayed on its perch so as to not miss out on any fish. Eventually it remained too long, so that its talons froze onto the limb, and it could NOT let go. Ahh... sadly, it seems that at first the eagle had the limb, but then the limb had the eagle.*⁴ (Pause)

Yes, perhaps the landowner’s fist had become too tightly closed. He had neither other humans nor God in conversation with him. Note how often he uses the word, “my” or “I”. I think its 11 times in 3 verses. “My crops”, “my barns”, “my grain”, “my goods”. “I will do this”, “I will pull down”. “I will build”. “I will store”. No one else was on his radar, no one for whom he was responsible, no one who could benefit from the blessing of the abundant crop. The land was his.

³ Shannon Kirchner. “Give, Grow, Become!” <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/101815>. (accessed 7-28-22)

⁴King Duncan. Sermon: “Why We Give” <https://www.esermons.com/sermon/why-we-give/1347110> (accessed 11-3-15)

The barns were his. The grain was his and the goods were his. He had no neighbor and no need for God. His life was all about himself.

In addition, he had bought into his culture's lie that we are what we own! He'd done what Jesus warned against. He'd let his life "*consist in an abundance of possessions.*" And he'd forgotten about God's command in the Hebrew law to watch over the widow, the orphan and the stranger in the land, to leave the borders of one's fields unharvested from which the poor could glean...to simply share one's abundance with those who do not have enough and cannot make ends meet. It's a command...no room for hedging, wiggling, or privileged maneuvering.

You know, in our very materialistic culture and during this financially unstable time, we too risk believing the lie, that we are what we own. There was a song in the musical "*Rent*", the 1996 musical by Johnathan Larson which you might know, which addresses this so well. "*Rent*" was about some socially unconventional people, bohemians, living in East Village, NYC. They were a mixed bag of junkies, cynical individualists and revolutionary artists. They, however, were also people who had the great ability to see and sarcastically expose the sin of the world in which they lived. The song describes this lie which has been called "the number one enemy of the soul".⁵ The lyrics are these: *Don't breathe too deep. Don't think all day. Dive into work. Drive the other way. The drip of hurt. That pint of shame. It goes away. Just play the game. You're living in America. At the end of the millennium. You're living in America. Leave your conscience at the tone. And when you're living in America. At the end of the millennium, you are what you own.*⁶

Yes, in our culture and time, it's easy for us to succumb to the lie that we are what we own. In addition, we can quickly, like the landowner, lose sight of God's command to care for the less fortunate. We forget that all we have comes from God and belongs to God, that it is merely on loan to us to begin with. We forget that being "rich toward God" (honoring our Giver of all good gifts) is done through our sharing of the blessings we've received. Several years ago a *survey was published in USA Today that indicated that on the average, people with incomes below \$10,000*

⁵ Ted Wardlaw. "*A Homily*". Delivered at the PEER Conference of 2002.

⁶ Johnathan Larson. "*What You Own*" In: *Rent* Producer: Rob Cavallo. Quoted in Ted Wardlaw, "*Homily*". Delivered at the PEER Conference of 2002.

give to charity 3X proportionally more than people with incomes \$50,000 - \$100,000 and people with incomes \$10-50,000 give almost twice as much proportionally as people in the \$100,000-\$200,000 category. While there are exceptions, certainly, the reason is this is because we are not so unlike eagles on ice crusted limbs.⁷

The landowner became frozen on his limb and his life was racing toward the end without him having secured the treasure that Jesus calls, “eternal”, without him having lived a life “rich toward God” and leaving the world a better place by sharing his possessions. Everything he had was going to end up rotting and wasting away. God called this man of the parable a fool. And sadly, it was an eternal fool, God called him.

Friends, while Jesus told the parable in order to help the man asking the question about his inheritance, he also provided the lesson for us as well. It is especially meaningful for you and I in our time and place when it is tempting to complain or to panic because our “stuff” or our economic futures are being seemingly threatened. It is a lesson for us here and now when we are likely to worship the idols of fear and scarcity, to start in with the “my’s” and “I’s” ourselves, and when we it is easy to give into the culture’s lie that we are what we own. It is a lesson for us now for it is now when pressures are great that we may forget that our abundance is a gift from God, on loan from God, and our lives need publicly embody our gratitude by sharing with God’s people!⁸

So, brothers and sisters, let us go from here today with great intent to not be as the foolish landowner. Let us let our hearts and minds get beyond the borders of our fields, our bank accounts, our investments, our 401K’s, and let us grasp that vision for the truly new and abundant life, lived with God forever. Let’s answer Father Haughey’s statement instead with our own... *“We read the Gospel, knowing we have been blessed with money, and we spend our money as if we know something of the Gospel.” Amen.*

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Shannon Kirchner