

Luke 12:13-21

13 Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

14 Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?”

15 Then Jesus said to them, “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.” 16 Then he told them a parable: “A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. 17 He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! 18 Then he thought, Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my grain and goods. 19 I’ll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ 21 This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God.”

May God Bless to our understanding the words we hear today.

May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It’s not about the money...not in this parable and not in life although sometimes it feels that way.

I had someone ask me once if Jesus hated rich people because he always seems so down on people with wealth...and even though it may feel that way, it's not about the money. In our parable today you will notice that Jesus does not warn against the money, wealth or material stuff. What he does warn about is greed, about that insatiable feeling that too often overcomes us, that feeling of never having enough.

That was the rich farmer's problem, not that he was rich, not that he had a good harvest or that he wanted to plan for his future. It was that his good fortune gave way to greed and once he started getting greedy it curved his vision from having any kind of outward focus and became all internally focused so that everything that he sees starts and ends with himself.

You can hear it in the way that he talks...he does not talk to someone else, to a friend or a partner or a neighbor and a parent or a spouse, but only with himself. "I will do this: I will put down my barns and build bigger ones where I will store all of MY grains and MY goods. And I will say to MY soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

Do you see what I mean? It's a very egocentric conversation; he even talks about himself to himself! And that is why he is a fool, he has fallen for the idea that life, particularly the 'good life' consists of possessions. He who has all of the toys wins.

And you know, I can't blame him, this rich farmer, because if I want to be totally truthful, and I am not sure that I do, but if I want to be totally truthful, there is a part of the rich farmer in me. If we all want to be even just a little bit truthful we have to admit that there is a part of him in all of us. How comfortable do you feel about the possibility that God is looking at you right this minute and thinking "You

fool!” That is what really stopped me up. I would like God to think a variety of things about me but “You fool” is not one of them.

If it is not about the possessions than what does a good life consist of, what should we be investing in for the sake of our soul? If you have heard even a small percentage of the sermons coming from this pulpit, if you take any time at all to read and study what Jesus has to say in the gospels it is a pretty clear message: relationships-relationships with each other and with God, the two really cannot be separated. We have to know and understand who our God is and we have to know and understand who our neighbor is and we have to love God and love our neighbor with the same fierce dedication. This means that in everyone, EVERYONE we come into contact with and EVERYONE that we see but maybe don't know, EVERYONE is our neighbor and that is why we care for those who don't have enough and we love our enemies and we help those in need because that is the gospel of love that Jesus preaches and teaches about over and over and over again. Not once does Jesus lift up a retirement account or a high-paying job as criteria for seeking the realm of God.

Which does not mean that ANY of those things are bad or wrong but they cannot be the sum focus of our life. Money is wonderful, it can provide for our family, it can be given to others, it can be used to create jobs and promote general welfare, it makes a comfortable life possible...it just cannot produce the kind of full and abundant life that each of us seeks and that Jesus promises. So it's not about the money but our attitude towards it and towards those around us.

I think that most of us know and believe that what Jesus says is true. If you can't believe Jesus at least believe the Beatles when they tell us that money can't buy us love, we know that it can't buy us happiness...but the thing is, that even though we

know it deep down back in the lower recesses of our minds, even though we know it, most of us struggle to live this way...most of us are seduced to invest our souls in the same message that captured the soul of the farmer in Jesus' parable.

And that is not really surprising is it? If you watch any TV, or spend any time on the computer, or read magazines, or listen to the radio you know that we are overloaded with the very message that the farmer bought into. The majority of advertisements in media are designed to exploit our insecurity...Is your breath bad, are you too fat, too skinny, fix your eyes, fix your teeth, nip and tuck, get rich quick, it preys on our insecurities and then offers us something to buy-mouthwash, a weight loss program, a newer, bigger car that will take care of all of our concerns and make us acceptable again.

So how do we live as Christians within this kind of conflict, how do we live faithfully with abundance and into the abundant life that Jesus invites us to? Some things are immediately easy to see. Relationships, community, purpose-the kinds of things that Jesus invites us to embrace and to strive for every day. I think our challenge is that we have got to start moving our sense of relationship and community and purpose out of this building. We all know who we are when we are here, but the catch is, that's not what counts...that is the easy stuff...But I see more, I dream of more, as individuals and as a church we need to start finding a different way of living and being and relating to each other and to God. And that means there are things we need to be aware of and talk about and maybe even...god forbid...DO somethings differently.

This is not about the money it is about our soul investment! And it's a challenge but here are some ways we can meet that challenge.

1. We need to start honest and open conversations about money, a subject that we tend to stay away from in church, and we need to stop doing that. Money is too important to ignore and if we keep silent than we let other people make the decision about what we hear. Remember, money isn't the problem; our culturally informed beliefs about what makes a good life is. St. Augustine once said that God gave us people to love and things to use, and sin, in short, is the confusion of these two things. So I would like to see a conversation started about the use and abuse of material wealth and how we as a faith community can begin to live into the kind of abundant life that material wealth can support but not produce...in short how to we start to live rich in God not rich in things.

2) Practice naming blessings. The elements of abundant life that Jesus describes throughout the gospels -- things like relationship, community, love, purpose -- may be less tangible but they are also more powerful than material goods. And each of us experiences them every day. The joy of a good conversation, the sense of purpose that comes from helping another, the warmth of a loving relationship, the feeling of community from gathering with friends or family, the awareness of how many ways we are blessed each and every day -- these things are palpably and powerfully available to us, but an entire media universe pushes us to tune into what is negative or missing rather than what is positive and right in front of us. I invite you to begin a daily practice of noticing, naming, and giving thanks for blessings.

The third thing is that I am going to give you is a real challenge. I invite you to join me in imagining how we can begin conversations and support each other in living into the kingdom life that Jesus describes. How do we begin to be fiscally responsible in our lives, how do we begin to invest in our souls and live a life where we are rich with God? One way to start...sit down as a family, sit down as friends and let's make a commitment to not buy any unnecessary or new thing for

6 months in order to break the culturally-induced habit of trying to buy happiness...and this might be hard to do but think back a minute to all of the stuff you bought in the last 6 months since Christmas...what is still in use, what got broken and did any of it truly make you happy? Happy in the same way that living into a life that is rich with God does?

Will any of this save us from mindless materialism and contribute to our soul investment. Not alone it won't... But part of the promise of this week's scripture is that Jesus came to tell us that God wants so much more for us than simply more stuff. God wants for us life and love and mercy and community. And God will not stop sharing this message. Indeed, the same Jesus who warns against greed and invites abundant life and tells us of God's love carries this message all the way to the cross so that we can see just how much God loves us....so, let's talk. HA