



Sunday July 31, 2022  
Luke 12:13-21 (Eighth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

When I first looked at today's Gospel, I have to admit my immediate reaction was to grumble a little bit, because the truth is...I really, really don't want to talk about money. We're often taught that it's not polite to discuss money. And most of us are uncomfortable when others ask us about it – especially when they ask in ways that challenge our lifestyle or our priorities. But here's the thing – Jesus doesn't care about our middle-class sensibilities. So, here we go.

Have you ever bought new stuff to organize and hold your old stuff so you could make room for even more stuff? Or have you ever been so envious or wishful for someone else's life that you were unable or unwilling to celebrate their successes or abilities? You look at them and say to yourself, "Why isn't that me? That's not fair!"

Have you ever bought something to make yourself feel better? Maybe because you were sad, lonely, angry, or scared. You wanted a new life or a new feeling more than a new thing – but you bought it anyway. Has the dialogue of your life ever been primarily in the first person singular? I want, I need, I did, I hope, I achieved, I accomplished, I will – I...I...I.

If any of this sounds familiar, or if you answered yes, or even if you didn't but you understand what I'm talking about, then you just might know something about what Jesus is talking about. Jesus says over and over again that we must beware of what money can do to us. What he's speaking about is the toxic presence of greed in our lives. And please hear me clearly – I'm not saying any of this as a judgment or a criticism against anyone. I'm simply recognizing that I, and maybe you too, can fall into the deception of greed as much as the man in today's gospel parable.

But just to be clear, Jesus doesn't warn against money, wealth, or material abundance. What he warns against is greed and the insatiable feeling of never having enough. The problem with the farmer in today's parable from Jesus isn't that he 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 skewed his vision so that everything he sees starts and ends with himself.

The man in the parable has chosen to live in a world of one. Speaking to himself about the pleasures he can enjoy, his words reveal that no one else matters to him. Listen again to the conversation he has with, not a spouse or a friend or a parent or a neighbor, but only with himself. "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." It's a completely egocentric conversation.

The parable that we hear from Jesus today digs deeper. It tells about greed's ability to bankrupt our soul and rewire our values. It offers an explanation for why otherwise ordinary or hard-working people might end up existing in their own self-absorbed universe, constructing lives in which they don't have to care about anyone else, especially people they can't see – or don't want to see.

As Jesus warns, there are all kinds of greed. It might be clothing, electronics, or any other tangible thing. It might be accumulating money, land, or other wealth. But greed can also be about time, attention, approval, love, knowledge, power, control, being right, being in charge, or a thousand other things. Jesus' warning is about an unbalanced or wrongly focused life. The man gave his heart to money when he should've given it to God.

Greed shows its true identity when it compels us to toss aside anyone who looks like they might threaten "what's ours." Greed causes us to construct worldviews in which our own self-interest is the primary virtue. It creates a web of lies whose whispers erode our capacity for community. And it makes fools of us all when it convinces us to justify our arrogance and hardened hearts.

Ultimately, though, greed isn't about any of these things. They're just the symptoms that point to the deeper issue. The issue is a condition of the heart. Greed is really just a way of dealing with our own feelings of deficit and emptiness. It's not so much about having enough but about being enough. When we believe ourselves to be deficient, when we lose belief in ourselves, when we feel we aren't enough, then we get greedy, and we use things and other people to fill the hole inside us.



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Greed deceives and convinces us that if we just have more \_\_\_\_\_ then we'll be \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blanks with whatever it might be for you. For example: If I have more money then I'll have a more secure future. If I get more books then I'll have more knowledge and answers. If I can get more of your time and attention then I'll feel accepted, important, and relevant. If I can gain more power and control then I'll be safe and respected. No one can hurt me.

Greed uses external things to deal with internal matters and it rarely works. It leaves us wanting more, always seeking the next dollar, the next thing, the next word of approval. The thing is – greed steals and deprives us of what we most want – life.

But this doesn't mean that money and things are inherently bad or wrong. They can be a benefit to us and others in lots of wonderful ways and they can provide a more comfortable life. They just can't produce the kind of full and abundant life that each of us truly seeks and that Jesus promises. So, it's not about the money or the stuff, it's about our attitude towards all of it and how we use it to benefit those around us.

If we read the rest of what Jesus says across the gospels it becomes pretty clear – the solution to greed isn't necessarily in cleaning out our closets or garages or giving away our belongings – though in some cases that might be a necessary starting point. It's in relationships with each other and most importantly with God.

It means that we're being invited to invest in each other and the world in the same ways in which Jesus invested himself – through love, mercy, compassion, justice, hope, courage, acceptance, truth, and generosity. This is the life God shares and invests in us through Jesus Christ. It reveals that there is always enough and that in the eyes of God we are always enough. Our self-worth comes not from things, but from God alone. It declares my life to be as important and valuable as yours. It eliminates the need for comparison and judgment of myself and others. Being takes priority over having.

I can't help but wonder as I think about all this if greed is what's at the core of our political cruelty, the violence in today's world, and the dysfunction and hurt in our relationships. We've filled the boxes, shelves, and closets of our lives with so much stuff that we have no need, no desire, and no room left for God. Greed works its deception and turns us back on ourselves and the dialogue of our life quickly becomes focused inward. *I know what I will do. I will pull down my barns. I will build larger barns. I will store my stuff in my new barns. I will relax. I will eat. I will drink. I will be merry.*

When that happens, greed has robbed me of you and the possibility of us. There's only me – a "fool" Jesus says in the parable; a fool who closes the barn door after the thief has escaped with my life. Jesus calls the man a fool because he does not revere God as the source and giver of all that he's received.

My friends, when we put God first in our lives, then we're no longer preoccupied with worrying about accumulating possessions. And in doing so we allow God to open us up to see that caring for and helping others are far more important priorities in life. When we put God first in our lives, we begin to use what we have to grow in our relationship with God and to help others know the abundance of God's love. When we live first for God and remember that God gives us everything we have, not so we can say how great we are, but so we can show others how great God is, then we are prioritizing what will last and is most important – a life with God and with others.

What if you lived that way? What if we all lived that way? How would our lives be different? How would our world be different? What possibilities would that create in our relationships and in the lives of all those we encounter each day?

The promise of this week's gospel is that Jesus came to tell us that God wants so much more for us than simply more stuff. God wants life and love and mercy and community for us. The problem isn't our money or our stuff, but our desire to look to it rather than to God and each other for life. Maybe all that's needed is for us to recognize that even our hard-earned, well-earned, and self-earned wealth comes from God and belongs to God. And when we do this, rather than looking inward we look upward – then God's priorities become our priorities. Thanks be to God. Amen.