

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

Psalm 49:1-12

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

07/31/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

13Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus,] “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15And 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.” 16Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18Then 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. 19And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20But 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?’ 21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Wealth

Good morning! I was hoping for a fun text to help me ease back into preaching after a month away, but it seems the Spirit had different ideas...

It seemed ironic to have a text like this one in the midst of great financial uncertainty for so many right now. Just listen to the following headlines I got when I searched “economy” in the news tab on google.com. *“U.S. Economy Shows Another Decline, Fanning Recession Fears,”* or *“The US is in a recession, the economy has been shrinking all year.”* If that’s not enough, here’s another one; *“Wall Street drops as shrinking economy brings recession closer.”* It doesn’t paint a very hopeful picture. But then I saw a few other news articles with much different headlines. *“Companies use inflation to hike prices and generate huge profits, report says.”* And another, *“Exxon and Chevron Report Record Profits on High Oil and Gas Prices.”* One article written in March is titled *“U.S. companies just had their best year since before most of us were born.”* Something feels off... doesn’t it?

*“20But 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?’
21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”*

“15And Jesus 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.”

Now, if you want some financial advice, listen to what St. Augustine had to say about our text and the rich man 1,700 years ago: *“He was planning to fill his soul with excessive and unnecessary feasting and was*

proudly disregarding all those empty bellies of the poor. He did not realize that the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than his barns."¹ It seems that for Augustine, giving the food away would give you a better return on your investment.

Let's break a few things down so you can understand the extent of the rich man's greed. The first is that the rich man seems to have ignored a few laws that were created to protect the poor. The largest was the fact that he has gone thoroughly through the fields several times to make sure he harvested every little bit. This may come as a surprise, but farming equipment has become a lot more efficient since the first century. Back then, it was not uncommon for the harvesters to miss some, but Jewish law stated that you could only go through the field once, and that the missed pieces were to be left for the poor, widow, orphan, stranger, and alien to glean.

One scholar points out that *"This farmer is only interested in his well-being, ignoring the needs of the poor peasants around him who will be affected by his decision. Jesus describes a self-centered farmer who makes an unethical profit and harms the economy. By hoarding his grain, the rich fool 'secures his economic power and position of status in the village as others are made more and more dependent on him.' The rich fool wants to control the market at the expense of his neighbors."*²

The greed of the rich man doesn't just affect him, but all those around him. That's the thing we often don't realize about our sin, we forget that our individual problem has communal repercussions. Reversing this has been a

¹ Just, Arthur A. *Luke. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003. p. 208.

²<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-18-3/commentary-on-luke-1213-21-5>

major theme for the Gospel writer of Luke. One scholar writes that “*We have known since Mary sang of the reversal of fortunes of the full and the empty that Luke would again and again raise the seductive and difficult subject of possessions. He will hold up as the standard for disciples the voluntary sharing of one’s goods. This, says Luke, was the message of John the Baptist and of Jesus and was the practice of early Christians.*”³

Seductive really is the right word for it too. It’s so easy to get caught up in wanting the best, the next best thing, or the better version of what you have. It’s so tempting to tell yourself that you need more, that the security cushion just isn’t large enough yet, that you just need a little bit more. It’s a problem for everyone, the rich and the poor. The impoverished fight and feel the real threat and insecurity the whole time, looming right behind them. But the wealthy are no different, that fear never leaves. As the income grows, so does the cost of living.

So what do we do? Well... I’m not really sure. This isn’t one of those sermons where I have an answer. And while I think we could all work towards giving more to the church and other organizations, I certainly don’t think giving everything away is the answer. But what I do know is that I think it’s important for us to use texts like this Sunday’s as a nice little reminder not to get carried away. When we put all that focus into hoarding, into collecting and fighting for more, we completely forget that God has been waiting with open arms the whole time. That’s the whole point of our very bleak first reading. “*Vanity of Vanities! All is vanity!*”⁴ The writer is arguing that whatever we choose to do with our lives can be utterly

³Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 163.

⁴ Ecclesiastes 1:2b NRSV

dismissed and forgotten after we die. It's only in God where we can find anything that is eternal.

I leave you with one more quote to ponder through the week. It's another from St. Augustine who writes that "*Greed wants to divide, just as love desires to gather. What is the significance of 'guard against all greed,' unless it is 'fill yourselves with love'?*"⁵ Amen.

⁵ Just, Arthur A. *Luke. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003. p. 207.