

Thanksgiving Sermon — 2021

Text – Luke 12:13-21

Then someone from the crowd said to Jesus: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus said to him: “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” And He said to them: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying: ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said: ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And then I will say to my soul: “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’ But God said to him: ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Theme – “Your Treasure”

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

Today we celebrate Thanksgiving by considering a famous parable of our Lord’s. A parable that illustrates God’s gifts and how, all too often, they are received. A parable that shows a startling LACK of thanks for those gifts. A parable that ought to make us examine what WE consider to be our treasure.

Jesus begins by telling us that a certain rich man’s fields had produced an abundant, bumper crop. So great a harvest, in fact, that the man’s storage bins and barns were not big enough to handle it all. Now, there’s a problem to have! So the rich man thinks about it for a while, and then decides he needs to build bigger barns to store all his vast wealth and produce. And then he says to himself: “*Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.*” To which God replies: “*Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*”

Now, obviously, God is NOT happy with the rich man. But why? What exactly was his sin? Is Jesus telling us that the man’s wealth was a problem for God? Well, of course not – the wealth came

from the Lord, so surely God could not be angry with the man for being rich. Nor is the problem in the man's decision to build bigger, better storage facilities to hold the bounty sent him by God. After all, God wants us to be good/wise stewards of His gifts to us, and that would include being careful in how we store, care, and account for our possessions. If the old barns could not hold all his harvest, it would be squandered, wasted, lost – and certainly that would not be good stewardship. Nor is God angry when the man says that he will “*eat, drink, and be merry*” – because God is certainly not some dour, sour stick-in-the-mud who begrudges us a good time. In fact, God is happy when we are able to rejoice and enjoy life.

No, the problem — the sin — comes in WHY the man says he will be able to “*eat, drink, and be merry*”. You see, the rich man looked to his goods, to his wealth, to his possessions to provide for his welfare – and not to God. The foolish man trusted in the **gifts** instead of in the Giver! He was rich, it was true. And that wealth would, he thought, give him all he needed to live – and to live well. But can money really do that? Does money feed us? Does money keep us healthy? Does money protect us? Does money love us? Of course not. No, money is only a tool – a means to an end. But, in and of itself, money (and all other earthly things) cannot give us health or happiness or life. Those only come from God.

Additionally, it seems clear that the man saw all this wealth as **his** – to be used for his own personal enjoyment. He was rich, and he would use all that money to pamper himself. Note, he does not say anything about helping the poor and needy. Nothing about giving back to God. Nothing about how God had entrusted all this to him, and that he should use it in accordance with God's desires (and not his own). So, a second (but related) sin is the man's selfishness, his lack of love for his neighbor, and his ingratitude toward God.

And while the rich fool was so busy in getting, keeping, enjoying, and trusting in his earthly goods, he neglected the One who had given him all that. While he was worshipping the idol of his heart, building its temple and giving it his loving service, the rich man did not even notice that he had completely forgotten God. And when God says that the man's end has come, could all his wealth – his vast fields, his full barns, his bulging money-bags, his well-fed belly – could any of that save him? Could it help him in the least? Of course not. No, tragically the rich man had learned the lesson that there is really only one God, and that all else is (to use the words of King Solomon) meaningless and “*a vanity of vanities*”. (pause)

Now, it should be clear to all of us that the rich fool of Christ's parable is not all that far removed from you and me, and how we treat the earthly goods God has given us. That is, all of us have a natural inclination to selfish greed, to worship the gifts instead of the Giver, to make false gods of the blessings that God has showered upon us. Seriously, look around the church tonight/today. How many starving folks do you see? How many are dying because they have no place to live? How many truly “poor” people are among us here? No, compared to our real needs (and to the rest of the world), we here in the United States are certainly rich. But do we handle that wealth any better than the fool of the parable?

We spend countless dollars on all sorts of frivolous stuff: from electronic gadgets and gizmos; to clothes we will wear only a few times; to vacation homes we barely use; to sporting events, watching millionaires face off against each other. We live in comfortable homes. We drive expensive cars and trucks. We throw away tons of food, simply because we are too full to eat it or because it is not our favorite. We always seem to have enough money to spend on our wants, yet we always seem to be complaining that we do not have enough.

Now, don't get me wrong: there are certainly some among us who ARE in need. Jesus Himself said that we would always have the poor with us, and we certainly do — even here in this most wealthy

land. And we have to admit that we do not do a very good job of taking care of those who are in need – here, and around the world. Sure, our nation sends all sorts of aid abroad; we have welfare programs; we talk about having safety nets. Yet, the truth be told, we would just as soon shut out any thought of the poor. Let someone else take care of them.

And don't get me started on how we treat God! He gives us all that we have, and then we grudgingly give back a tiny dribble of the great flood of blessings that He has poured out upon us. When the Church talks about stewardship, look out! It is a shame that we have to struggle to meet the budget, but it seems that every year the board has to send letters, or put an announcement in the bulletin, or make a special appeal to keep things going. In the Old Testament, God had told Israel that they were to give a tithe – 10% of everything -- as their offering. And that was **in addition** to the other sacrifices prescribed and required by the Law! Now, in the New Testament era (as we are in today), God does not make any such set requirement. But that does not mean God has no expectations from us in terms of our offerings. Far from it! But any sermon or talk about giving is sure to draw the wrath and complaints of God's dearly bought people. Truly, it is all quite sad.

You see, we are just like that Rich Fool. God has incredibly prospered us. We are truly rich, in so many ways. Yet we have lost focus. We have forgotten to live in thanks to the Giver, and instead have worshipped and adored and trusted in the gifts He has given us. Oh, I know we do not **mean** to do it. None of us **intends** to get caught up in the love of money, the enjoyment of comfort and ease, the worship of this world. But we have slowly, imperceptibly slipped into it. And we must confess our sin, our own foolishness. (pause)

The other day I read a sermon on this text that I thought was really quite good. And it was good because that pastor not only pointed out our sin – that is, how we are like the Rich Fool. But even more, that pastor then used this parable to point us to Jesus. And he did it this way: in the parable we are

shown a man who was rich by the gift of God, but who did not use that wealth either to worship God or to love/serve his neighbor. Well, this pastor said, Jesus is a different kind of Rich Man. He is rich because He is the Creator of all; everything is His – not because it was given to Him but because He made it! And yet this Rich Man gave it all up – for us and our salvation!

I like the point that pastor was making. And he is right: Jesus IS rich beyond all measure, being God. But He made Himself poor, for us. His Father sent Him down from heaven to lay aside full use of all that divine wealth and power and glory, to humble Himself under the Law and to take our place in life and in death. Where the Rich Fool of the parable gave no thought to God or his fellow-man, Jesus did His Father's will and sacrificed Himself on the altar of the cross, shedding His blood to wash away our sins.

Where you and I must certainly plead guilty of all manner of sin – including covetousness, and selfishness, and greed, and misuse of God's gifts to us, and erecting false gods and idols in our heart – Jesus Christ never — even once — failed to perfectly keep God's commandments. He obeyed where we go astray. He loved God above all things. He loved His neighbor (that would be you and me!) *more* than Himself. And He did all that to give US the credit! Then He went to the cross, suffered the hell we deserve, died our death, abandoned and rejected by all. But He rose on the third day – triumphant and victorious over sin/death/devil – proving that He has done all to save us, to reconcile us to His Father, to bring us back into the right relationship with God as His children once again.

It is done. Finished. Accomplished. For us, even though we are certainly not worthy. To the world, such a sacrifice seems foolish. But not so to God. No, He deemed it good and right, simply because He loves us. And as those who have received that love, that forgiveness, that gift of eternal life, we respond to His love with our own love and thanks. Not that it is perfect (for, sadly, it is not). Not that we always do a good job of sharing that love with others (in our charity and evangelism). Not that

we no longer need to be called to repentance over our failures to remain in that love (for we need such repentance each day). But, still, we strive and WANT to reflect/give that love we have received.

God has made Himself poor – poor by identifying completely with us, so completely that He has taken all our sin onto Himself – so that we might become truly rich. And we are. We are rich in receiving forgiveness, rich in the promise of heaven, rich in knowing God as our loving Father again. So it is that we can rightly “*eat, drink, and be merry*”. Not as the Rich Fool in our parable, but as those who rejoice in what God has given to us. The earthly gifts — every bite of food we eat, every swallow of water we drink, every breath in our lungs – they are all gifts of God’s grace to us. Every penny in our pocket, every person we meet, every day we live –these ALL come to us from the hand of our loving Father. But even more than those blessings, we rejoice in our Savior Jesus Christ (our true and great Treasure!) and what He has done for us — and in what the Holy Spirit has given us: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, a place in our Father’s family. And THAT is why we can truly and rightly “*eat, drink, and be merry*” on this Thanksgiving Day — and EVERY day. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

We continue with our next hymn, “*For the Fruits of His Creation*” (LSB #894)...