Trinity Lutheran Church

3 August 2025

(Eighth Sunday after Pentecost)

***Luke 12:13-21***

*13Someone in the crowd said to him, “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.”*

Today's gospel text is short, to the point, and has little need of a pastor or a biblical scholar to explain it. It's clearly about the evils of greed…that is, people who have too much and don't share enough. For me, and perhaps for you, I’m quite uncomfortable with what Jesus has to say here. Some people have told me they don't like this text because it makes them feel guilty. I understand that because it makes me feel guilty as well. I have no intention of dulling the truth of this story Jesus told. But you know what? If you **are** guilty then **feeling** guilty is the natural, healthy response. If a friend or a pet gets sick you feel bad, their illness makes you sad. Nobody likes to feel sad but sadness is an appropriate reaction when someone you love isn't feeling well. Likewise, **feeling** guilty is an appropriate response when you know that you are indeed guilty.

When you think about it. Feeling guilty is one of the few emotions that society tells us is totally unacceptable. We understand and can sympathize when someone laughs or cries or gets angry or becomes frustrated. These are all socially accepted emotions. But when someone says that they’re feeling guilty psychologists are quick to tell us they shouldn't feel that way, and then they make excuses for them until they no longer feel guilty.

We’ve become really good at doing this when it comes to these words of Jesus aren’t we? "I'm not wealth. Look at the sport’s figures with their multi-million dollar contracts, look at popular actors, celebrities, and all the rich politicians…they’re wealthy, not me. I have three kids to raise, and even my neighbor, why he makes more money than I do and I'm far more generous than he is" excuses, excuses, excuses, anything to deny we are guilty and thus avoid that uncomfortable guilty feeling.

And why do we do that? Why do we make excuses and tend to only compare ourselves to those who have more then we do? Because when we feel guilty we instinctively know we should do something about it—and all of us really hate to do anything about it. We all dislike change...especially when we don’t personally benefit from the change. Instead we prefer that those around us change to suit us.

In this story Jesus tells us we are guilty and the first step in eliminating that guilt, and the accompanying guilty feeling, is to face reality and admit that we are indeed guilty. But more about that later.

For now lets re-look at the text itself. In Luke's gospel it has three sections. It starts out with a man asking Jesus to settle an inheritance issue he's having with his brother.

In the second section Jesus refuses his request and then addresses those present with a warning about greed.

This is followed by the third section which is a parable about the barn-guy. You know, the parable that makes us all a bit uncomfortable. Let's look a little closer at each section.

The first section is about the man who asked Jesus to help settle an inheritance problem. In Jesus day this was a really important issue. The Middle East was not a capitalist society. And now, two thousand years later, it still isn't. There was, and still is, no such thing as upward mobility and most live in abject poverty. If your father was a farmer or a shopkeeper then you became a farmer or a shopkeeper. There is no thought or hope, of being anything else. An inheritance, then, was the only way one had of even slightly improving their lot in life. So, as you an guess, inheritance often became a contentious issue. Jesus refuses to get involved in this dispute but instead uses this encounter to talk to the crowd about the evils of greed.

In the second section Jesus warns the crowd that greed is something that you have to watch out for because it can sneak up on you unaware. When **we** think about greed we usually imagine someone who has a lot but is never satisfied and always wants more. The Greek word here gives us a slightly different perspective. The word simply means "*desiring more than what you currently have*". In other words greed isn't just a rich persons sin, it's something that can affect anyone. I have a nephew who, several years ago, joined the marines. He did three tours in Iraq. I caught up with him while I was stationed in Japan. This was right after he completed his first tour in Iraq and in a conversation over dinner he shared with me how shocking and disturbing it was for him to see the poverty so many were living in. He told me that he went with one man into his house looking for unauthorized weapons. When they entered the house he noticed the man took off his shoes at the doorway. The man lived with his wife and two adult sons. While in the house speaking to the father my nephew noticed that whenever one of his two sons left the house they would put on the same pair of shoes that the father left at the door.

I bring this up because as Americans we are often told we can have what we need, but not always what we want. Then our tendency is to **greatly exaggerate** what we need! Jesus here points out that our only need is God…and God alone. Yes, even a family with only one pair of shoes for three adults can become obsessed with material things and lose perspective.

This means you and I, regardless of our wealth, or lack thereof, can be sucked into looking for material things to bring us comfort, satisfaction, and inner peace. The definition of greed is “not being satisfied with what we currently have”... so we look for more stuff...convinced that if we just had enough "stuff" or the “right stuff” our lives would not feel so empty.

You know why we hate feeling guilty? Because we're not yet convinced that we have enough so that we can start sharing what we have with others. St. Augustine way back in the 4th century when reflecting on these verses wrote, "*God's desire for us is that we love people and use things. But we often do just the opposite, we end up using people and loving things*.”

Now we come to the parable. when you think about it, this is a rather unusual parable. Most of Jesus’ parables illustrate some aspect of the kingdom, of grace, of salvation. This parable, however, is more generic. In fact, the only character of the parable does not have any obvious connection to anything spiritual whatsoever. He looks to be a secular figure in every sense of the word.

But it is precisely this secular atmosphere and the complete isolation of this rich man that delivers this parable’s punch. This man is completely out there on his own, doing his own thing with no reference to anyone else. He is, Jesus says pointedly, a fool.

Fools are the folks that spit into the wind, they saw off the branch they’re sitting on, or as my mother used to say they would cut off their nose to spite their face. Confronted with the happy problem of a bumper crop, the barn-guy talks to himself, with no thought of God or consulting with his neighbors, and he concludes that the answer to his situation is to build a bigger barn. Then he congratulates himself for such forward looking thinking and convinces himself that with all his accumulated wealth he will spend many happy years eating, drinking, and enjoying a care-free life.

Let's look first at what the parable doesn't say. The parable doesn't condemn the barn-guy for being wealthy. God does not scold him for wanting to eat, drink and be merry. No, the barn-guy is foolish because he is so self-absorbed. He’s thinking only about himself and his own desires. Ten times in three verses we hear the words "I" or "my", " *What should* ***I*** *do, for* ***I*** *have no place to store my crops?’ 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. And* ***I*** *will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.*" Never once does he mention his family, or his employees, or anyone else. He is totally self-consumed. Keep in mind he had a bumper crop and prior to the invention of tractors and motor driven combines he became wealthy by the blood, sweat and tears of those he hired. He also talks about building new barns. I sincerely doubt that he intended to do the work himself. Just like bringing in the crops he'll hire others to do the hard labor for him. True, he probably paid his employees their salary which is his only legal obligation but what Jesus is pointing out in this parable is that satisfying the legal requirement may bring wealth but it only increases ones insecurity.

The problem with money and wealth is that it promises to give us what only God can give. Money for its own sake, seeks to take the place of God in our lives. When money becomes our god it will lead to greed. Greed lies to us, it blinds us, and it ultimately destroys us. There is not a problem with possessing wealth…but there is great peril in **being possessed** by wealth. When people are defined by what they own, what they own ends up owning them.

During the last presidential election cycle I remember listening to a reporter on the radio as she went around the Republican convention center asking people to comment on the convention slogan, "Make America Great Again". As could be expected those interviewed in the hall thought the slogan was wonderful, inspirational, and just what this country needed to hear. When she went outside and interviewed the protesters it was no surprise that they were all quite critical of the slogan. However, one woman's comment caught my attention. She said, "What I want to hear. What will inspire me is a politician promoting the slogan “Make America **Grateful** Again!”

The more I thought about it the more I think her comment is the point of Jesus’ parable. The problem with the barn-guy is not that he was rich, not that he wanted to retire and enjoy his golden years, not that he wanted to be financially secure enough to eat, drink, and be merry. The problem with the barn-guy is that he was not grateful for the life and abundance God had given him. Luther defined sin as a person being turned in upon oneself. Being rich towards God is living a life in gratitude for what God has given us and when we live in gratitude for what we have…and not in fear of what may be taken away in the future…we open our lives, our possessions, and our talents to others.

When you think about it, where does this obsession for more stuff come from? It seems to me that the source of greed is a lack of satisfaction with life. A gnawing feeling of insecurity and a belief deep down that what God provides for us is just not enough. There’s always something else we feel we need but don't yet have. There’s always another “golden calf”, another car, another pair of shoes, another experience on our bucket list that we imagine we just have to have to enrich our lives. But no matter how much stuff we manage to acquire, or exciting experiences we have, it’s never enough. There’s still an empty place inside us that won’t be filled with newer, nicer, better things, or more expensive exotic vacations.

The real solution to this never ending frantic obsession is not to deny our guilt and find excuses to continue on the never ending, and never satisfying, merry-go-round of accumulating more and more stuff.

But the solution lies in owning up to our guilt, make confession to God, and tell God enough is enough. It’s telling God, “I feel guilty because I am guilty and I need your help to live a grateful life…a life of gratitude for what you have given me.

This is the new life that God offers us all. It is a life that is truly fulfilling and meaningful, a life content with God’s love, knowing that whatever things we have God will transform them into everything we could ever need. It is a life lived not in fear that we don't have enough, but a life lived in gratitude for what we have been given. A life lived in gratitude seeks to serve those around us--especially by sharing what we have with them.

Jesus calls this life “being rich toward God” (Lk 12:21). When we confess our guilt and grasp on to God's forgiveness we can see the folly of thinking that anything else could possibly satisfy us. It is then that we can grasp on to the truth that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" AMEN.