

The Power of Greed

Deacon Robert Millott

St. Andrews Anglican Church

Sermon on Luke 12:13-21

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O God, forasmuch as without you we are not able to please you; Mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
AMEN.

Today's Gospel reading has two stories. The first is where a man shouts out from the crowd asking Jesus to help settle an inheritance issue. Jesus responded to the man in LK 12:14 saying "Man who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus' response kind of echoes what Moses wrote in Exodus 2:14, where Moses tried to stop two Hebrew men from fighting. One of the men asked Moses "Who made you prince and a judge over us." Torah law already addressed the situation that the man wanted settled. Deuteronomy 21:17 provides a double portion of the inheritance in the case of a first son. If there are two sons then the oldest one would get 2/3rds and the second son 1/3rd.

The man in today's reading wasn't thinking about anyone but himself. He was entitled to his portion of the inheritance, but

in this instance, he was being self-centered and only thinking of himself. Some of you may have heard of inheritance squabbles where people are fighting over furniture and dishes and other assets as well as money.

The man's self-interest in himself in this morning's Gospel, clashes with what Jesus was preaching to the crowd that had assembled around the little village of Bethany. Jesus was speaking to a crowd of thousands about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He told them in Luke 12:1 "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy". Pharisees were known to be hypocrites. They often did not practice what they proclaimed the people should be doing. Jesus continued preaching to them and told them in Luke 12:4 "do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed has authority to cast into hell." Jesus also told the crowd in Luke 12:8 "I tell you everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Jesus warned the crowd that they would face opposition, and to be assured that when they needed to defend themselves in the synagogues, that He would give them the words to say to the authorities.

Jesus spoke about greed in a number of places in the gospels. Some of them are: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. LK4:4, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the

whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” LK9:25 and “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat what you will drink nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more important than food, and the body more than clothing”. Matt. 6:25-34

Jesus continues to tell the crowd a story about a foolish rich man. Listen as I read the story again, after he realizes how much grain he has and hear how many times the man uses the first-person pronoun. “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? “And he said, “I will do this: I will tear 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.” LK 12:17-19. This man was very self-centered. But he had a surprise awaiting him. That night God told the man that his soul was going to be required of him.

This man lost sight on how fragile his life was. Ours are just as fragile. The man never thought about his own mortality and he was about to lose it that night. Like in the story of the five foolish virgins who were not ready for the bridegroom and were locked out from the wedding feast. They were not prepared. The rich man thought his life was going to go on and on and never gave a thought about what would happen to his soul after he died. Have you given thought about your souls after you die? Every one of us in this church building will die.

The rich man never gave a thought of looking to God for guidance as to what he should do with all his grain and wealth. He only asked himself what he should do. He never thought about the future, just the present about eating, drinking, and being merry. He never once thought about storing up treasure in Heaven. He had no concern for the poor as a good Jew was supposed to do. He just kept thinking about himself and all that he possessed. He soon was going to find out he was wrong. Very wrong! God told him that night his soul was going to be required of him. We have no idea when our souls will be required of us.

This man was not rich towards God. You may wonder what being rich towards God means. Here are some ways to start.

1. We should be thankful for the many blessings God has given us. When we go to bed at night and say our prayers we should give thanks to God for the blessings of that day.
2. Be good in stewardship. That means returning to God a portion of what He has given us.
3. We should be generous towards our neighbor. Jesus has told us to love our neighbor. As I have mentioned on several occasions our neighbor is not the people in the house next door, but the person we meet in the store, on the sidewalk, or other places. Jesus said in LK 10:27 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus is not telling us we can't have hobbies and collect items such as coins, stamps, or fishing lures and so forth. I myself enjoy putting together my HO layout and have collected a lot of stuff over many years. But we should not let our collections drive us from our Christian obligations to our neighbors or building up treasures in Heaven.

The rich man in today's gospel reminded me of a TV show Diane and I watched some time ago. I think it was called Hoarders. A man had so much stuff he had accumulated over the years. He was a retired college professor and had a good retirement. He was single and his house was so full of stuff he could barely walk in it. The stuff was mostly brand new. His bedroom along with the other rooms in the house were crammed full. He even had stuff piled on his bed. I hate to think when he last changed the linens on that bed. His garage was full and he had two cars in the drive way that were stuffed plus piles on the drive way that were covered with a blue tarp. He lived in an Home Owners Association and was being fined for not cleaning up his yard. His son decided to step in and contacted a company to clean out the house and yard. The father agreed but he wanted to inspect each and every item that was going to be tossed. Needless to say, things got off to a very slow start. It took a long time plus several 2000-pound capacity dumpsters full to clear the items away. Mind you now, he did not get rid of everything. His dining room was clear and his bedroom was clear and he could walk through the house safely.

He had so much stuff he could never use. Sadly, he never thought of giving it to Salvation Army where they could have helped those in need.

Today's rich man could have helped feed the hungry in his community. If he were a good Jew, he would have been expected to help his neighbors.

Jesus warns us in the gospels about being greedy, also known as avarice, which is the desire to possess more than we need or can use. Some people buy things just so someone else can't have them. In today's gospel Jesus warns us about greed and possessing more than we need. Madison Ave. does its best to get us to buy things whether they are needed or not.

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:9-10 "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

I want to close with a story about The Needy King and a Sage.

A Sage was passing through the capital city of a famous king. While he was walking, he noticed a single coin on the road. He picked it up. He was satisfied with his simple living and he had no use of that coin. So, he planned to donate it to someone who was in need of it. He strolled around the streets

throughout the day but didn't find anyone who needed it. Finally, he reached a rest area and spent the night there.

After he did his daily morning activities, he sees that a king is going for his invasion of another state with his war ready army. When the king saw the Sage standing, he ordered his army to be stopped. He came to the Sage and said, "Oh Great Sage, I am going to war to win another state so that my state can be expanded. So, bless me to be victorious".

After thinking, the Sage gave the single coin to the king. The king was confused because he was already one of the richest kings. He curiously asked the Sage, "What's the meaning of this one coin?"

The Sage explained, "Oh Great King! I found this coin yesterday while strolling around the streets of your capital city. I had no use of it. So, I had decided that I will donate it to someone needy. I strolled around till the evening in your capital, but found no one who was needy. Everyone was living a happy life. It seemed that they were satisfied with what they had. So, I found no one to give this coin. But today, the king of this state, still has the desire for more and not satisfied with what he already has, so I felt you were in need of this coin."

The king realized his mistake and gave up the planned war.

The moral to this story is: We all should learn to be happy with what we have. Yes, we all desire more or better than we already have, but do not waste a chance of enjoying what you

already have. There are those who may not have what you have, and there will be some who have lots more than you have. Do not compare, be happy and lead a healthy life.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory, world without end. AMEN.

All scripture citations are taken from the ESV Bible by Crossway.