

Luke 12: 13-21
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Putting God FIRST: Share the Wealth
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Then [Jesus] told them a parable: “A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my grain and goods. I’ll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?’ This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God.”

This month we are reflecting on stewardship of self and resources and what it means to put God FIRST in living and giving. Today’s lesson, on what it means to be rich towards God, is probably the most challenging week, because it challenges our entire economic system. We are told to earn, save, and invest. Business thrive when they innovate and expand. Budgets and bank accounts are the markers of success. **But how much is enough?**

We’d like to believe that wealth is relative—after all, there is always someone wealthier and poorer than we are. This is the kind of passage that Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates needs to hear, not people like us. But Jesus isn’t interested in amounts; he is concerned about attitudes. The story begins: a rich man owned land and it happened that the land produced a particularly bountiful harvest. Through no extreme effort or ingenuity of his own—the man came into considerable wealth. In those days, farming was not an

exact science—seeds were scattered haphazardly on the ground. Crops were at the mercy of the wind and the rain; and there was little irrigation and certainly no farm subsidies. Every planting season, a farmer took a sizable gamble. He or she could not predict if the crops would survive.

And it so happens that this particular man, in this particular season, ends up with a bumper crop. We're not talking about a few extra bushels here; it's an outstanding harvest, enough provision to last many years. The "fruits" of his labor are in such abundance that he has to tear down his existing barns and build up a new, larger one. It's a situation many to which many of us can relate: this apartment has become too small, time to upgrade to something...roomier. Our home is too crowded, time to build a storage shed in the backyard. Soon, the house that seemed empty becomes filled with possessions. Comedian George Carlin once quipped, "that's all your house is -- it's a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get more stuff." Or as another person observed, "the only difference between rich and poor is that rich have more storage."

Surrounded by all his stuff, the man is content—he has enough supplies to keep him fed for many years to come, despite famine or drought. "Soul, take ease," he says to himself. "Eat, drink, be merry!" But as soon as the guy makes his self-satisfied remark about "being merry," God speaks to him, and calls him "Fool!" Jesus ends the story, telling the crowd gathered around him, "you are foolish, too, if you put your trust in material possessions and are not rich towards God."

The rich man forgot is that his newfound wealth was never his to begin with. It was God's. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," the Psalmist proclaims. Everything we receive from the earth is a gift from God. Every seed the man planted, every plant nourished by the fertile soil, every stalk of wheat that managed to survive the glaring of a relentless sun was a gift from God. When the man harvests his fields, he never thinks to

return the blessing. Instead, he hoards God's abundance. He didn't think, "Hey, I have all this grain, maybe I should donate the surplus to the local food pantry." No, he immediately gathers his contractor and architect and begins designing a bigger and better barn to stash his newly acquired wealth.

The dividing line between saving money for the future and hoarding resources is ambiguous. It is wise stewardship to have money to pay bills with plenty left over. But so many of us have been taught the myth of scarcity--that there will never be enough, so we need to be sure to get ours. In her book, *The Soul of Money*, Lynne Twist writes:

For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is "I didn't get enough sleep." The next one is "I don't have enough time." Whether true or not, that thought of not enough occurs to us automatically before we even think to question or examine it. We spend most of the hours and the days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don't have enough of ... We don't have enough exercise. We don't have enough work. We don't have enough profits. We don't have enough power. We don't have enough wilderness. We don't have enough weekends. Of course, we don't have enough money—ever. We're not thin enough, we're not smart enough, we're not pretty enough or fit enough or educated or successful enough, or rich enough—ever. Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we're already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds race with a litany of what we didn't get, or didn't get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to the reverie of lack ... What begins as a simple expression of the hurried life, or even the challenged life, grows into the great justification for an unfulfilled life.

Jesus challenges us to reject these ideas of scarcity. This is the same God who can transform loaves and fishes into a catered lunch for thousands. The paradox is that abundance is experienced only when resources are shared. When we store up treasures for ourselves, we become deficient in our love for God. The problem with material wealth is that it tends to inspire complacency. We see it in this story—as soon as the man harvests his field, he tells his “soul to take ease.” With his needs taken care of, he can go on spiritual auto-pilot, he can set his life on cruise-control and no longer be troubled.

What’s foolish about money is that those who have it often place their trust in their wealth and no longer trust in God. After this passage, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples not to be anxious about what they eat or where, because God provides for the ravens and clothes the lilies of the valley. Jesus instructs his disciples not to lay up treasures on earth, which are temporary, but to become rich towards God, who is infinite. The rich fool missed an opportunity to serve a deeper purpose. He was given an opportunity to share his abundance with others, and he chose to lay up treasures for himself. Instead of building a bigger barn, he could have built a bigger table, and invited others to share.

Lynne Twist explains,

We each have the choice in any setting to step back and let go of the mindset of scarcity. Once we let go of scarcity, we discover the surprising truth of sufficiency. By sufficiency, I don’t mean a quantity of anything. Sufficiency isn’t two steps up from poverty or one step short of abundance. It isn’t a measure of barely enough or more than enough. Sufficiency isn’t an amount at all. It is an experience, a context we generate, a declaration, a knowing that there is enough, and that we are enough. Sufficiency resides inside of each of us, and

we can call it forward. It is a consciousness, an attention, an intentional choosing of the way we think about our circumstances.³

How much is enough? That is for you to decide. Letting go of the myth of scarcity, and embracing sufficiency, is the journey of wisdom. We are enough. What we have is enough. God's love is enough. Being rich towards God is not something we stash in a barn, but a mindset that cultivates generosity, sufficiency, and joy.

Thanks be to God.