

# Money Can't Buy Me Love

Luke 12:13-21

Thanksgiving Sunday

Let us pray..... *“Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; Take our minds and think through them; Take our hearts and set them on fire with love for You, Lord Jesus. Amen.”*

And 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.”

In our Gospel text this morning Jesus is not warning the crowd about money – he warns about greed.

On Thursday most of us will gather with family or friends in gratitude to celebrate Thanksgiving and to remember the story of our Pilgrim fathers and mothers as they gave grateful thanks to God on that day in 1621. The fact is that in their first year at Plymouth Plantation half of their company died of starvation and disease. Yes, they had to be worried if they could survive another New England winter but they looked to God and thanked Him for the gift of freedom and their meager bounty that amounted to five kernels of corn for each person.

At that first Thanksgiving meal that corn was not eaten for God provided them an abundant feast through the generosity of the Native Americans who performed the work of God as they welcomed these first immigrants to their land. In their gratitude the Pilgrims put aside their fears and trusted in God’s abundance yet to come, planting that corn in the spring. Their Thanksgiving meal the next year was a table filled with corn pudding and pheasant and venison and cider - the bounty that God had provided for them from five kernels of corn and the loving generosity of the Wampanoag tribe.

Yet in the span of two generations, the Pilgrims’ gratitude was to be replaced by greed as the new settlers usurped more and more of the native American’s land, violated sacred burial grounds, over fished and hunted the waters and forests of the region and let their cattle trample the Wampanoag corn fields.

Greed was and is a zero sum game. As the Pilgrims prospered by grabbing more and more of the Wampanoag resources, the Native Americans declined as they faced malnutrition and disease.

Greed was a zero sum game especially in the time of Jesus. In the Gospels we read of widows being cheated out of their inheritance by corrupt judges. We read of the downtrodden and disabled left to die in the streets of starvation. We read of the Jerusalem Temple being adorned

with gold and jewels funded by exorbitant taxes levied on those who struggled daily to scratch out a living.

And this morning we read of brother versus brother as they argue over their father's inheritance.

To all of this Jesus told them a parable:

“The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘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.’”

The rich man's greed distorts his vision of God's providence and everything he sees begins and ends with himself, begins and ends with his sense of lack, begins and ends with his sense that enough is never enough, begins and ends with his lack of charity to the less fortunate.

How many times have we fallen victim to that same misguided idea? How many times have we thought “Money can buy me ..... fill in the blanks. If I have more money I'll be able to get.....” How many of us bought lottery tickets during these past weeks and dreamt how that \$1.6 Billion would give us everything we ever wanted in life?

Greed causes other problems for the rich man. He is awake at night because there is an aching loneliness that haunts him. All of his money can't buy him love. All of his money can't buy him peace. All of his money can't buy him meaning for his life.

The wealthy rich man's only friend is himself, his “soul.” “And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ There is no one else in his existence other than self. He is isolated – he already is dead and doesn't even know it.

Greed is a problem because his focus on self - his wealth, his financial security keeps him from discerning that all good gifts come from God. The rich man believes that if he just had more stuff and money, then everything will be all right.

The rich man fails to see that God is the creator of all and that God calls him to not hoard but be a faithful steward of God's bounty. And for the rich man's misguided belief that money defines a rich life God says to him “You fool. When you store up treasures for yourself you are not rich toward God.”

The rich man is foolish because he believes that the good life consists only of possessions and not being rich toward God. But perhaps the rich man is unable to be rich toward God because of his worry about tomorrow. Perhaps the rich man is unable to be rich towards God because his heart is not filled with gratitude and thanksgiving for all that God has given him.

Gratitude does not come easily, especially when we are caught in the grip of worry. Nor does gratitude come in a sudden conversion. It comes through a slow turning away from worry by

intentionally stopping to find something, anything, for which to thank God. In the midst of worry, this can be a real challenge.

Jesus understood this. He tells us take something simple for which to give thanks: a bird, a flower, a blade of grass, a breath of air, a glass of water, five grains of corn. Anything will do. It is the small step of moving out of self to give God thanks for something or someone beyond the self that brings gratitude.

This small step leads us to finally see what Jesus is trying to tell us: everything is God's, and God is eagerly waiting to give us more and more just like those five kernels of corn that God multiplied into a bounteous harvest.

Jesus wants us to notice what is in front of us, to believe that God is present and to be thankful. By adopting gratitude, we can discover God's abundance. It's a funny thing, but gratitude takes math out of the equation. We no longer worry about how much is enough. When gratitude replaces fear, even when we find we have less than we had yesterday or last year, gratitude reveals that we have far more than we need.

So how should we be rich toward God? Place your trust in God instead of banking on wealth or safety or stuff. Trust in the eternal economy of God's grace and mercy. Put aside your worries and know that God is faithful just as God was on that first Thanksgiving Day.

Jesus tells us that a rich life is not made up of possessions or money but of loving relationships - relationships that glorify God by giving to others - relationships that give meaning to our lives - relationships that you have come to cherish in this church.

How is Christ calling you to be rich toward God? This morning I wonder what matters to you? What gives your life meaning? What will give our church meaning in this upcoming year? How can we make a faith-filled difference with the abundance of time and treasure that God has entrusted to us? How can we be Thanksgiving people?

I believe that the first verse of our closing hymn shows us the way to be Thanksgiving people with these words:

*Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices;  
Who from our mothers' arms has blest us on our way  
With countless gifts of love and still is ours today.*

Yes, that's it! Now thank we all our God with all of our hearts - our time, treasure and talents; Now thank we all our God with our hands - the products of our labors; Now thank we all our God with our voices - our call for justice and compassion for those in need.

We are called to give our thanks to God without restraint, all that we have and all that we are. In return, we trust God will create new lives shaped by his extravagant love.

In response to God's extravagant love, let us offer our unbounded gratitude to God. Let us spend our lives giving gratitude and thanks to God as Pope Francis writes to us

“Go out. Go out and share your testimony, go out and interact with your brothers and sisters, go out and share, go out and ask. Become the Word in body as well as in spirit, do not cede to the worry and pessimism that the devil places before us every day. Instead, let us find new ways to spread the word of God to every corner of the world" - New ways that are paved with thanks and extravagant love.

Happy Thanksgiving to you all. Amen