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“The Things We Think We Need”

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Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist on the abundance of possessions.” Then he 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 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 and be merry.’ But 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? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.’”

Two brothers—one a bachelor, the other married—owned a farm whose fertile soil yielded an abundance of grain. Half the grain went to one brother and half to the other.

All went well at first. Then, every now and then, the married man began to wake with a start from his sleep at night and think: “This isn’t fair. My brother isn’t married, he’s all alone, and he gets only half of the produce of the farm. Here I am with a wife and five kids, and I have all the security I need for my old age. But who will care for my poor brother when he gets old? He needs to save much more for the future than he does at present, so his need is obviously greater than mine.”

With that he would get out of bed, steal over to his brother’s place, and pour a sackful of grain into his brother’s granary.

The bachelor brother too began to get the same attacks. Every once in a while he would wake from his sleep and say to himself: "This simply isn't fair. My brother has a wife and five kids and he gets only half the produce of the land. Now I have no one except myself to support. So is it **just** that my poor brother, whose need is obviously greater than mine, should receive exactly as much as I do?" Then he would get out of bed and pour a sackful of grain into his brother's granary.

One night they got out of bed at the same time and ran into each other, each with a sack of grain on his back!

Many years later, after their death, the story leaked out. So when the townsfolk wanted to build a church, they chose the spot at which the two brothers met, for they could not think of any place in the town that was holier than that one.

The primary action of loving others, through the sharing of what we have, promises unexpected gifts and grace. In loving others first we are responding to God's love and that love will be returned. Our motivation is not in what we will receive but in loving and the natural response of giving... because of God. When our giving to others comes from the God in us, we are not concerned, nor does it even occur to us, that we be recognized or receive in return. We act out of our true created state of being, our God center, and we are blessed accordingly.

That is the kind of action or behavior of faith that Jesus calls forth in our Luke passage today, one that Jesus is eager to address through the telling of the parable. One from the crowd asks for Jesus assistance in gaining a share of family inheritance, and Jesus response is the story or parable referred to as "The Rich Fool." While the farmer was not accused of theft, mistreatment, or any other criminal act, and *apparently not* a fool when it came to successful farming and preparation of storage of his harvest; he is, Jesus says, a fool. A rich fool, rich in goods and foolish toward God. The sharing of his abundant blessing is for him...alone.

The parable calls covetousness, the strong desire to possess, folly. It was a violation of the Law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets, and seems to have been a widespread problem in the church. Putting goods in the place of God, which Paul in Romans named idolatry, serving the creature rather than the Creator. A disregard for the needs of others.

And of course a lesson for us today. The method and means of covetousness in the world have changed, some, and have become far more complicated, but Jesus' words are just as applicable, powerful and true.

Perhaps one of the most important reminders for us to acknowledge personally from this lesson relates to our own need for security in the holding of things. We all must address this as we experience the challenge of giving generously versus appropriate spending and saving in our personal finances as we continue to make decisions about what to give, what to buy now, what to save.

We experience the challenge of giving of our **time** as we decide what to give and what to save for ourselves, what will cause burn out or take from others who need us, what will be the right thing to do with our time that is in service to others.

We experience the challenge of giving in our relationships as we decide how much to give of ourselves, how much to share from deep within our soul, whether in intimate partnership or in group and social settings. We risk responses that deny our worth, and the more it happens, the more we retreat to silence and fear, the more we are greedy with revealing who we are, saving it inside for no one, even God, whose desire for intimacy with us suffers as a result of that fear of sharing our deep self.

We experience the challenge of giving at First United Methodist Church Pasadena, as new and different voices come bringing new needs and new ways of doing things, challenging and changing things that have been sacred and important feeling for many. Creating, for some, a fear of losing what is important, that security feels threatened.

Here's Jesus, pushing that security button, pulling that reversal again. ***“the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”***

Those who store up treasures for themselves are not rich toward God.”

You can have all of these things, all of this goodness, and if you are not paying attention to the needs of others, you are not with God.

It can be easy to cross the line to greed and an inappropriate grasping for *things*. We live in a world full of fear and intimidation. We ourselves may feel fearful and intimidated at some level, we may lose our job, our health, things we hold important keep changing, people keep changing, life is crowded, confusing, and unsafe. We have to deal with new authority figures and powers in our lives that ask us to do and be things we don't want to do or feel incapable of doing.

Fear and intimidation may first produce silence and denial. Denial is our protective *response* to unwanted change. Think of abuse victims who are scared silent and even deny wrongdoing by the perpetrator out of their fear. Think of the silence that may have come over you at times you felt you were treated unjustly, or when you are suddenly asked to deal with something that feels too big to comprehend, and the denial games you may have played to keep from feeling the reality; or to convince yourself you are over reacting.

All human, all hard stuff.

God calls us to hard stuff.

But it is no giant step to move from that fear and intimidation we all encounter to some degree, to the larger arena of anxiety and fear. Anxiety and fear produce greed and a grasping after things as a means of securing one's future.

Faith and trust allow us to share our resources in a new way, to share our gifts beyond ourselves, knowing and trusting that as we do this for God, with God, we will be blessed. We need not fear.

An amazing thing can happen in the process of trusting God so much that we give of ourselves in these ways, the fear of losing what we have, the fear of losing what has been...subsides!

Put another way, Give, in spite of the evidence against it, and then watch the evidence change!

We are talking about stewardship...which at first may conjure up that sensitive time in the church when we are asked to give, and give more. Stewardship is simply the sharing of God's gifts to take care of God's world, for God has provided our gifts. Good stewardship is the best possible use of the resources available to achieve the greatest life potential.

An honest accounting of our stewardship is the first step, or the continual step in our lives. A continual conversation with God about *the things we think we need* and continual careful listening to God, who speaks to us in prayer and in the prayer of life around.

The 5 year old grand daughter of a friend was shopping with her mother, on this particular occasion, to purchase materials for an upcoming VBS. As with many 5 year old children, she saw many things that she wanted! After one too many exclamations of, "Mommy, I want that, her mom wisely educated her that they were only purchasing things that they needed for the church.

No problem, Tiffany simply changed her request,
"Mommy, I need that, Mommy, I need that"

If we don't truly reveal ourselves to God in that continual conversation, we can rationalize and change the truth

Today I propose three areas to assess if we are to honestly ponder the relationship of storing up treasures for our own selves rather than being rich with God.

1. Do you spend more of your energy promoting life and God's love in the world, or more energy taking away from life?

Put simply...do you spend more time with God or without God?

Think about it. This is a very personal evaluation. With every encounter we have in life, we have the opportunity to encourage or discourage God's presence. To encourage or discourage life. To participate in the act of making another's life more meaningful. From destruction of the earth's resources to destruction of another's esteem and worth, we have potential for great influence in either direction.

Rabbi Eugene Markovitz died on September 26, 2003 at the age of 82. He was a rabbi for 52 years in Clifton, New Jersey. In 1988, on Halloween eve, 4 youths struck 4 sites in the neighborhood of Clifton, spray-painting anti-Jewish and hateful phrases. The 13 and 14 year old pranksters were caught quickly. The angry judge was ready to send them to juvenile prison for 2 years. Enter Markovitz, who was consulted. He recommended community service, with specific education about Judaism. The boys were sentenced to 25 hrs of tutelage under Markovitz and 30 hrs helping around his synagogue. They visited holocaust museums, learned about concentration camps, and the power of the symbols they had carelessly painted. They don't have to love Jews, Markovitz said, they need to learn to respect them. That they did, and one of the youths

was quoted as saying, Rabbi saved my life, by moving me away from gang life. One became a lawyer, the other a police officer.

Rabbi Markovitz spent more energy promoting life, new life, and God's love in the world.

What matters is not what you have but the power that what you have has on you; it is how much you give to life measured against how much you take

2. Do you honor your Sabbath time? Do you fill and renew yourself spiritually on a regular basis?

Richard J. Hauser in a piece called **In His Spirit suggests** "One reason we have difficulty praying is that we are unable to quiet down enough to become sensitive to the movements of the Spirit. This usually happens because we have been living our lives at too fast a pace. Rushing from one activity to the next, we lose touch with the Spirit. We come to prayer restless and find it almost impossible to quiet our minds in a way that allows us to be sensitive to the movements of the Spirit. Since we cannot allow the Spirit to bring us to the Lord, we begin composing our own needs and concerns, often in a rushed and rather compulsive way. It often seems that we could be using our time more effectively by skipping prayer and finishing the work we left undone. Prayer will remain difficult until we develop a rhythm of life that enables us to work in tune with the Spirit, thus experiencing the peace and joy that flows from the Spirit's presence. If we are living in tune with the Spirit during the day, it is easy to allow the Spirit to unite us to the Lord during prayer."

.We fill our life with all kinds of stuff, again filling that place where God would love to be present and would love to be shared.

We must be still to know God

3. Do you have a strong aspect of serving and giving in your life?

At different life stages this can look like different things... if we are the parent of a young child or we are in a care-giving role with another, we are probably serving as much as we are able in our life stage.

Specific acts of sacrificial service, that is, not for our own benefit, promise a great and powerful gift in return.

We cannot have a meaningful life if we do not give of ourselves in some way to help the life of another. God has given us the gift of life; we give life in return. We will be blessed abundantly, eternally.

As we give over and over we become more able through the grace and power and limitless love of Christ! And, through the miracle of grace, we can respond to another's tragedy in the midst of our own.

My own personal revelation about the extent of God's gift of giving became more fully developed; I'm somewhat reluctant to admit, years into my Ministry at my former congregation when my first husband Steve was dying seven years ago. Actually, I probably don't need to be reluctant to admit it, but rather grateful that my faith journey had brought me to a place that I was ready and trusting enough to respond in this way. Ready to listen to the real message that God was revealing as I welcomed God's present love.

I was walking through days feeling like a wound up knot of sorrow and grief. I hated what was happening, I hated the disease with out a cure and with out answers. I hated feeling like it was impossible to feel happy when someone I loved was going through this. I hated....well... I'll stop there.

One day I was at work, at church, something I was able to continue because of the caregivers for Steve who came largely from my former church community. It was one of those days that I was able to get completely wrapped up in a task for a long period of time and outside of myself. I "came back in", if you will, to the

dark reality of my life but with a new, unanticipated realization! I was healing by giving, outside and away from my sorrow. I felt as if my knotted up dark place was renewed and cleansed in a new way. It was a feeling of hope and a message of spiritual growth. There was a deep and unexpected, almost miraculous feeling of joy, realizing the blessing that giving can offer at all times and in all places of our lives. I *knew* then that I did have the strength to go on, which I had sometimes doubted. I knew the healing gift of giving in a new way.

Ann Frank, in her too short years on this earth but with wisdom beyond those years, said, “Open your **eyes** be fair in your own dealings, you can always, always give something, even if it is a simple act of kindness!”

In Ephesians Paul reminds us, “You have been saved through faith; this is not your own doing! it is a gift of God—“

Trust in this gift; receive this gift, for in spite of the material world evidence against it, the evidence will change!

...Cause God rules, if we let God rule...

Thanks be to God!