

When More is Too Much
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Seattle First Baptist Church
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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 arbitrator over you?” And 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.” 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 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.’ 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.

I cannot remember a time when I was so excited about the lectionary text of the day. Most times when I am on deck to preach, I look at the text for the week, and like Bill Malcomson said last week I think oh great, what am I supposed to do with this? But here is a text that really speaks to me as a pastor and a financial planner. I could hardly wait for Sunday to get here.

First, I would like to read the text one more time from The Message, a paraphrased translation of the Christian scriptures by Eugene Peterson. The Message puts a contemporary twist on scripture. It reads:

Someone out of the crowd said, “Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance” He (Jesus) replied, “Mister, what makes you think it’s any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?” Speaking to the people, he (Jesus) went on, “Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.” Then he told them this story. “The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: “What can I do? My barn isn’t big enough for this harvest.” Then he said, ‘Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll gather in all my grain and goods, and I’ll say to myself, “Self, you’ve done well! You’ve got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!” Just then God showed up and said, “fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it!” That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.” That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.

I would like to tag this message, When More is Too Much.

We live in a consumer culture. All our media is geared toward us getting more, keeping more, and using more. Even when we don’t *need* anything else--we want more. Our closets may be bulging at the seams and yet we see a new dress, or new pair of shoes, or a new purse, or a new set of clubs and all of a sudden we can’t live without these new things.

Acquiring more things for most of us has nothing to do with need. Sometimes we are just bored. So instead of going to the gym to get some exercise, or playing Pokeman Go, we start shopping on line. We can see a hundred books, kitchen gadgets, or garden gnomes in less than 5 minutes and we want them all.

Sometimes we want more because we are lonely. Instead of examining what is going on in our heart and our spirit, we medicate by buying more things. Yet, even after we purchase all those must have things our loneliness, that emptiness, still exists.

Some athletes and entertainers pride themselves on being the highest paid at their art or at their position. I really like football. I enjoy seeing the best players and I want the Seahawks to always win. But, how much better is a \$75M contract than a \$70M contract? How many Ferraris and Lamborghinis does a person really need? And what does it say about our culture that pays entertainers that much money and our teachers are woefully underpaid and have to come out of their pockets for supplies for their students?

When does one step over the line of need and move into the arena of greed? Jesus said be careful. Protect yourself against all kinds of greed.

Financial planners are at times challenged by the social construct of more is better. When doing retirement and legacy planning, there is the temptation to say how about saving just a little more. Maybe you should work one more year, then you can rest assured knowing that all will be well. Or will it? When is enough, enough? Or, when is more, just too much?

Sometimes our **things** can give us a false sense of security. We can start to depend on our economic status, our social standing, our families, our accomplishments, and our egos instead of depending on God.

In our text this morning, Jesus was asked to weigh in on a family dispute that had to do with estate planning. Obviously, a younger brother felt he was being unfairly treated regarding the family inheritance. The laws at that time had the eldest son receiving a double portion of what the other sons received. In this story, the older brother was not about to give up what was lawfully his. So a family fight was already in process. Perhaps the younger son had good reason to expect more than what he was given. And by the way, daughters received nothing unless there were no sons.

These kinds of family fights still happen today. Someone is left out of the will and feelings are hurt for life. Siblings stop speaking. Holiday meals become war zones, or there are no more family dinners at all.

Jesus had enough sense not to get caught up in things that didn't really matter. Sometimes we get so distracted by little things that we don't have enough energy to do the things that really matter.

Churches can spend six months meeting about new carpet colors, banners, and hymnals, and never get outside the sanctuary walls to share the love of Jesus to those in the neighborhood. We can get so busy running from meeting to meeting, supporting all manner of good causes and forget to stop and see the beauty of God's creation right outside our doors and replenish our very souls for the

journey. We can buy our loved ones all manner of trinkets and baubles forgetting that what they really want is our time--not more things.

Jesus warned the younger brother about greed and thinking that life was all about his inheritance and getting more. There was a posting on Facebook this week that read, "No one is going to stand up at your funeral and say, she had a really expensive couch and great shoes. Don't make life about stuff." Jesus said, "Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."

Jesus pivoted the conversation about inheritance and told a story about a prosperous business man. We don't know much about the character of the man in Jesus' parable. We don't know if he was a ruthless business man and prided himself on the art of the deal. We don't know if he paid fair wages and believed in raising the minimum wage to a livable wage. We do know that his crops produced prolifically.

I imagine he had some options regarding his overflow of blessings. He could have chosen to give the crops away to those who helped grow them, or he could try to keep every last kernel himself. He chose the latter. But now he had a storage problem. Anytime we try to keep all of God's blessings to ourselves, we are going to have a storage problem.

God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others—not so that we can sit and count all the kernels of our overflow. If you have computer expertise and learn things easily, you have to teach others. If God has been forgiving and compassionate to you, you have to show forgiveness and compassion to others. If you have the gift of art, music, and dance, you can't sit on those gifts and just do the movements in your head. Either you use them or you lose them.

If we have more than enough money, food, clothes, or time, we have to give away that which we can't use so someone else can be blessed. The old folks used to say, to whom much is given, much is required. And, if we are honest, God blesses us not because of who we are, but in spite of who we are. God blesses us because God can--not because we are all that great.

Well, our farmer thought since he had so much more than what his current facilities could hold, he would tear down his barns and build bigger barns. Then he said, "I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, 'Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy, put your feet up, cruise the world, and have the time of your life!'" Now, I believe a healthy self esteem is a good thing. If we don't believe in our self, no one else will. At times we have to pat ourselves on the back when no one else notices our accomplishments.

But, at no time does this farmer think of anyone other than himself. When we cease to care about the community around us, we are in big trouble. Ask the people of Flint, MI, Baltimore, Ferguson and dozens of other cities. When profits become more important than people, judgement is on the way. When net worth becomes more important than the worth of those who are marginalized an uprising is on the way. When the status quo and a false peace is more important than justice, turmoil is already brewing. God told this man, you fool. Tonight you die! Now, who gets all that you saved up for yourself?

Then Jesus ends the parable by saying, "That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

God wants to be the center of our lives, the center of our joy, and the love of our lives. If ever we start to think we are the center of our universe, we are in trouble and we die. Maybe not an immediate physical death like the man in Jesus' story, but we die a slow spiritual/ emotional death. Jesus said it best, seek ye first the realm or kingdom of God and God's righteousness, then all other things will be added unto you.

Our closing hymn is , Be Now My Vision #451. If you are here today and would like to become part of this community of faith, we invite you to come forward during this song.

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