

Luke 12: 13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰ 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?’ ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Trinity Presbyterian Church October 15, 2017

“Lessons in Green: Cashing in Our Gifts” Stewardship Week #1

*(***Each word in [brackets] denotes the use of that word in sign language in which the congregation participates by speaking the word out loud.***)*

Each and every one of us is magnificently made! We are not “magnificently” made. We are magnificently made! And when you are magnificently made, you are given [gifts]. It doesn’t matter our age, our gender, our ethnicity or race, it makes no difference how we identify or orient our love; whether we have inabilities or disabilities, every single human being on this earth has a God-given [gift] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world]. Some of our [gifts] are big. Some of our [gifts] are small. But every single [gift] you have, regardless of its size, is a [gift] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world] into a more loving place. So take a moment and say to your neighbor these four words: “you have a gift.” Now turn to your other neighbor and tell them, “you have a gift.”

When I look around the room, I see [gifts] of voices for song and voices for justice. I see compassionate souls who will sit with each other no matter how dark the day seems. I see spiritual parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles who made baptismal vows to share their [gifts] with our children. I see children who have [gifts] beyond their years. I see artists who teach us to see the world in a new way and business minded folks who keep us honest with the budget. All these wonderful [gifts] right here, in this small church. Doesn’t it feel good to be reminded? We all have [gifts] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world].

Now what about our cash? I was afraid the topic might change the mood in the room. But do we not also believe that our cash is a [gift] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world]? Yet, for some reason something changes when we talk about money. Martin Luther, 500 year ago, said Oh Lord, you can have my soul. I'll give you my heart and my mind, but please don't touch my wallet! Why is it so hard to talk about money as a [gift] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world]? Confession: I don't like to talk to you about cash. Why? Because I am all too aware that one-third of the budget goes to supporting my salary. The last thing I want to do is convince you to give more of your dollars. It's embarrassing. Chances are you don't want to talk to me about it. Nobody wants to know how much we're giving. We fold our checks before we place them in the offering plate so nobody sees the amount—I do it too. Why is it we let everyone see our Time and Talent Sheets—our God-given gifts, but not our pledge cards—that's too personal. Why is it so hard for the church to talk about money? Even though we'd all probably admit that [cash] is a [gift] that [God] expects us to [use] to help transform [the world].

Well, here's the rub: Jesus isn't shy about the topic. Actually, he talks more about money than anything else. Correction: he *warns us about money more than anything else*. Beware of greed in all its tricky forms. Spin the globe and drop a finger anywhere in our world. Even if we live paycheck to paycheck we have a 9/10 chance that we will still be in the top 10% of the world's wealth. Be careful, says Jesus. There was a farmer—already wealthy. Had a wide roof over his head. Slept comfortably on a king-size Sealy Tempurpedic mattress. He could afford to eat out from time to time. He has everything he could possibly need. Then one day he looks out his window and sees the harvest—wow, a bumper crop! So, he starts to have a conversation with himself: “Self,” he says, “What are we going to do with all this stuff? We need more storage.” How many of us have said that before! And like a good capitalist he says, “I know, I'll just build bigger silos.” Then he starts comforting his soul: “Soul,” he says, “You will be set for the rest of your life. You can retire early. Eat. Drink. Be happy.” Now is it just me or does it sound like a solid plan. I mean, it's what we all want. Work hard. Save up. Build for the future. And one day we can enjoy the rest of our days without much worry. Jesus knows the plan. It's why he's always talking—I mean warning us—about our wealth. Beware, says Jesus, of greed in all its forms.

But we know what happens next. We know the fate of the farmer. God shows up. “You fool! Tonight, your life will be demanded of you and all the lovely plans you made for yourself will go to waste.” It's the only parable where God's lament enters the drama. “You fool! Did you not see that all you have been given is a [gift] that I expected you to [use] to help [transform the world]?”

You see, God knows that if each and every one of us shared the [gifts] we were given collectively—the [gifts] that are big, as well as the [gifts] that are small. If every person in the room and outside of this room, took the time to discern what their [gifts] were, and were willing to [use] them to help transform [the world] in a way that was [connected], then our world would be in a radically different place.

Jesus speaks the parable in response to a brother's request that his brother split his inheritance evenly. It is a fair request. One brother has his stuff, while the other brother gets his stuff. But Jesus sees through it. Perhaps he knows that greed divides and tries to convince us that you can have your stuff while I can have my stuff and we can be perfectly happy living in our own separate silos. But how can we transform [the world] if the [gifts] that [God] gave us aren't being [used] in a way that is [connected]?

Every [gift] we have been given is to be [used] with the understanding that we are all [connected].

Every Time and Talent sheet, no matter if you are a Golden ager, a baby boomer, a Gen Xer, a Millennials, or whatever is beyond a Millennial, is to be filled out with the understanding that our [gifts] are going to be [used] in a way that is [connected].

Every pledge card, even if the amount is zero dollars, needs to be filled out because we are beginning to understand that all our [gifts]—no matter how big or small—are going to [used] by [God] to help transform [the world] in a way that is [connected].

So take a moment and look around the room. Go ahead. Look around. Do you see the gift? Do you see how rich in God we are? Look again at someone else. Look them in the eyes this time—make a connection. Do you see the gift? Do you see how rich in God we are?

[Singing "Bind Us Together, Lord Bind Us together with cords that cannot be broken..."]