

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-26

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

Covetousness is a spiritual disease. It's no fun, being afflicted with spiritual disease. Satan, the unbelieving world, and our own sinful flesh lie to us, promising comfort, promising an elevated life. It's fairly easy to spot. Material wealth is the carrot that is dangled in front of us and like a hypnotized zombie, we chase a phantom. Have you ever discovered, after the fact, that you were played for a patsy? Has covetousness *ever* served you well? Bad choices, an icky feeling inside, and, ultimately, God is left out of the conversation. Covetousness has *never* served me well. Covetousness is defined as a strong and often excessive desire for possessions, particularly those belonging to others. It's a feeling of envy and greed, often fueled by comparing oneself to others.

Jesus is adept at diagnosing spiritual disease – but He doesn't stop there. How would you like to go see your physician who adeptly identifies your ailment and then you ask, "OK doctor, what do we do now?" And he just shrugs and says, "jeepers, I don't know. You're on your own now. Good luck!" That's not Christianity. That's not the Kingdom of God. That's not the ministry of the Lord Christ. There's not just a diagnosis; there's a corrective. Christ and His life – that's our corrective and He is most certainly at work.

A man just kind of blurts out, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). The Lord is not wearing zebra stripes. The Lord is not a referee. This is God in the flesh. He came to deliver man from the clutches of greed – by bearing it, by suffering directly the punishment it deserves. He's not going to allow Himself to be used in service to man's petty financial squabbles. But Jesus is ready to point out the larger issue. Please don't think that this is "everyone else's problem." This is our issue – yours and mine. A sober examination of our heart is the path to growth, the path to genuine contentment and peace. What Jesus says in reply to that man is for everyone. "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). A parable follows – relatable window into the human heart – mine and yours.

A rich farmer dude experiences a bumper crop. God has blessed him. To be sure, God gives gifts for us to use, for us to enjoy. This fella likely worked hard, had a good business model, and applied himself to his vocation. All of that is conjecture – but useful – because I suspect that those attributes describe a great many of us. Irrespective of his work, God blessed him. And the rich farmer dude has a conversation. Who does he converse with? No one but himself. Spiritually, the rich farmer dude has blinkers on. He doesn't consult God. God's not in his consideration. I, me, my – the rich farmer dude is on a first-person singular pronoun tear. He's got a problem – nowhere to store his grain. He's a cross between King Midas and Augustus Gloop. He's a cross between Gordon Gekko (from the movie Wall Street) and Mr. Burns (from The Simpsons). It's a spiritual disease. Those fictional characters that I mentioned didn't know, didn't much care, that they had a disease of the heart.

Jesus hit his audience with a sober judgment – death. “Fool! This night your soul is required of you” (Luke 12:20). It doesn’t seem like a happy, heavenly home-coming kind of death. A vacuous, self-serving, materialistic heart – it’s a disease that has an unhappy mortality date. It’s supposed to be an attention grabber, Jesus telling us of this fictional man’s death. The final line is emphatic: “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Being rich toward God – have you considered what that means? Isn’t that the key? Wouldn’t you like to know how to be rich toward God? I mean, if that’s the whole lesson, if that’s the climax of Jesus’ story for that fella who shouted, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me,” then don’t you want to know how to be rich toward God?

Shortly before Jesus died, there was a woman who took a very expensive alabaster jar of ointment and she poured it on the Lord’s head. Jesus described her gesture as anointing Him for His burial (Matthew 26:6-13). Can we do that? No. Some women were venturing to the Lord’s tomb to anoint His corpse on Easter. It was love that sent them on this errand. They were rich toward God. Can we recreate this gesture? No. Do you have a desire to be “rich toward God”? In another one of Jesus’ parables, the Lord said this: “As much as you do it for one the least of these, my brethren, you do it for me” (Matthew 25:40). Did you get that? When you are kind, when you are generous to others with your courtesy, when you help someone in need, when you display grace and charity and patience and love and genuine interest in your fellow man, in befriending the stranger, assisting the troubled neighbor, defending the unborn, being mindful of the widow, the orphan – who are you doing it for? Being rich toward God starts with being rich toward those in your orbit. A giving spirit – is it in you? The rich farmer dude didn’t know where to store his grain. If he had had a giving spirit he would have seen that he could’ve stored his grain in the mouths of the poor.

Three people have died in our beloved congregation in short order. I knew them; I knew them all very well. They had giving spirits. They were gifted with a generous heart. Where did that come from? Lily Laine – what will she learn as she grows? What will her loving parents model for her? What will the gospel engender in her heart? How many of you are still growing? How many of you want to learn *more*, discover *more* of our Lord’s character, His sacrifice, His present love, His forgiveness, His depth of commitment to you – do you want to learn more? I would suggest to you that learning of Christ, receiving His gifts, cherishing His service toward you – that is the pathway to blooming with a giving spirit. On our own, we don’t manufacture love. God gives it to us. Christ’s life blooms in those who joyfully receive what He wills to give.

Let’s revisit this whole episode and look at it through the lens of Christ’s life. He came from the Father’s throne to ensure that you would receive His inheritance – not a partial measure; the whole thing. Your elder Brother, the Prince of Heaven, took upon Himself our flesh to give you His inheritance – life, resurrection, heaven, a place at the Father’s right hand – that is your inheritance. It came by way of Jesus’ suffering. He emptied Himself in order to fill you (Philippians 2:7). His life was demanded of Him and He gladly gave it – to save you, Jesus gave His life for you. Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). Poor in the manger; poor on the cross; poor with our sin; poor with our death. It was a blessed exchange, a sweet swap. He takes what is ours and gives to us what is His. You become rich. Rich with Christ’s righteousness, rich with grace and divine humility and eternal love. Like Lily, you were washed in holy baptism and raised a new creation. Like Fred Nowak and Elsie

Albanese and Mary McCarthy, you learn how tenderly the Lord loves you and a generous spirit is the product. The Lord is the Potter and we are the clay. He makes you rich; you know it; and then you naturally serve your neighbor. Right now, this congregation is flourishing because the Gospel has found a place in our lives by virtue of Christ's love we become rich toward God. I see it every day.

You are the living storehouses for Christ's righteousness. God puts it in you and you manifest His character. The Lord Christ and His ministry is the corrective for our spiritual disease. He is our health. He is our spiritual vitality. He is the One who was rich toward God. It is a joy to follow Him. It is a joy to live a life reflective of Him.