

Proper 13 C  
St. Luke 12:13-21  
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St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## Greed & Fear ~ Faith & Giving

*"Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

*"Greed is Good"* So said Gordon Gekko in the movie, **"Wall Street."** Greed pushes people to grab for all they can get. Sometimes it is downright ugly. It is never a pretty sight. However, we have glorified the consequences of greed, by dubbing it the measure of a successful human life. The more toys you have when you die, you win!

You might say that greed drives our economy. Human beings *need* very little to be happy. But we learn to want things, more than the meager things which it takes to get by in this life. Funny thing though, the more you have, the more your anxiety rises, because you worry about hanging onto your own stuff, protecting it and you also worry more whether you will continue to be able to afford the bills for it when they come due. The "success" at greed comes with a *high price*.

And then there is the realization that no matter how much you have, no matter how expensive your prize, there is always something more, something better, a newer, better, improved model. The happiness implied by a successfully materialistic life is elusive.

This even happens with people who relate to other human beings as *things* to be acquired and used: there is always a newer, better improved model, so they plow through dozens of relationships searching for their 'pearl of great price': but they never find him or her.

Those who have little or no conscience can do quite well, thank you, coping with the consequences of their greed. They simply insulate themselves from seeing it or drawing any connections between themselves and those effected by their actions. They leave many in their wake. But for others, living with the nagging guilt about their greed and materialistic wealth, it is something else again. If you have any kind of conscience at all, and most people do, then when you see an unfortunate soul you cannot be unmoved, but are drawn to respond in someway. And most folks would be very reluctant to walk over others to acquire their materialistic goals.

There are truly many forms of greed, but they all boil down to placing the self at the center of your own universe. It's all about you, your needs, and what will make you happy. However, we know that no **thing** will make you happy for long. The polish soon wears thin or fades off. We need a new thing to keep us excited and desiring the elusive goal that greed promises.

Money can be the root of all evil, and it can also be a source of great good. It depends on how it is acquired and how the owner of the bankroll uses it. When greed is mixed in with the acquisition of cash, sins occur and people get hurt. But when *generosity* is woven into the money, it is no longer about the number of dollars in the bank, but rather the number of people and good things you can do with it. The money becomes a special gift entrusted by God with you, and the challenge is how to use it in your ministry

to others, sharing God's grace and blessings with others, even strangers.

Indeed, Jesus says in this morning's Gospel reading that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Then what does it consist of? I believe the economy of God is about people. I believe the currency of God's economy is love. Love is how you pay forward the love that you receive, and when you stop and think about it, God has been very generous with God's love to each one of us. We have much to be thankful for and much to pay forward.

It is in giving that we receive. These were the words of one of the greatest of Christian saints: Saint Francis of Assisi. Generosity lived and done without regard to scarcity. Generosity not until it hurts, but until it feels real good. Generosity so woven into the fabric of who you are as a Christian person, that you are not even aware that you are being generous when you are doing so: it is simply who you are and who you must be.

The parable of the rich man seems like it happened to someone else. But if we fail to identify with this character, it is at our own peril! We are all rich men and women. *We are this guy.* We have built new barns and we have filled them with more stuff. We have more stuff than we know what to do with. Ah, but you might object: We're not farmers, we don't build barns to store our extra grain and supplies. How could this story relate to us?

I think we have built those barns: the garage full of stuff, the shed we added in the back yard, and the storage locker at the local storage facility. We have so much stuff, we don't know where to put it. Our homes fill up with many things, because we are taught to be mindless consumers. We hoard like a dysfunctional society with OCD-Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

We don't know when to recycle or give away our stuff. We save it for a rainy day, --on the slimmest of chances—just in case we might need it. Is it wrong to hoard our wealth? What do you think?

Jesus calls us to be mindful of the priorities of life in this little parable: *"Take care, be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."* Live with simplicity in mind. Travel **light** through life, you have heard it said before.

Unburden yourself, for possessions can become heavy chains which will enslave you and drag you down. Remember well the image of Marley's Ghost in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

But it is not enough to unburden yourself and live simply: this is good, but there is much more. How should we live in the world, while we have time left to live?

The message of today's parable teaches us that at anytime—even today—we may be called for an accounting of how we have lived our lives. It won't matter how much stuff you have accumulated—that will be irrelevant. What Jesus is forcing us to do is to look at our priorities in life, and reorder them radically. We know what earthly treasure is: money, stuff, possessions, awards and honors.

What is heavenly treasure? What do you think?  
What is in your storage house for your heavenly treasure?

As it warns us in today's Psalm, *"For we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish\* and leave their wealth to those who come after them. Their graves shall be their homes*

*forever, their dwelling places from generation to generation, \* though they call the lands after their own names. Even though honored, they can not live forever; they are like the beasts that perish."* Psalm 49:9-11

I hate to be harsh, but greed drives much of our economy. People invest money to make money, not necessarily to give it to their local charity, though some generous souls do this. We need more like Andrew Carnegie, Michael Bloomberg, Bill Gates, Ted Turner, Charles Feeney, and Warren Buffet, who have given away substantial portions of their wealth and who have given over greed for generosity. The most generous of these individuals who have given billions of dollars, I bet you have never heard of: Sulaiman bin Abdul Aziz Al Rajhi, a Muslim banker who has given away 965% of his wealth to charitable causes. Yet for many the motive behind greed is fear: fear that they will lose what they have; fear that they will not get their share; fear they will not be on top or have the resources to expand their growing egos. And who's ever shoulders they have to step on to get it, does not matter! Obviously not the Christian way of doing things...

*Faith drives God's economy.* Faith drives us into a new relationship with others, which dismisses fear and embraces our common humanity. Faith leads us to share without fear of scarcity if we do give away all that we have stored up. Faith can make you truly rich.

*"For we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish\* and leave their wealth to those who come after them."* The great equalizer is death, and Jesus is right to call our attention to it. Today, your life may be required of you! What good will any of the things you have set aside do you, if this is the case? You know you can't take any of it with you. Whose then, will

they be? My experience has been that the closer we come to our death, the older we grow, those possessions seem less and less important. Other things loom larger in the scheme of what our priorities should be in this life and what is truly important!

*"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,"* Paul says. Greed is not good. Giving is much better. Keep giving and you will find happiness there. AMEN