

Time after Pentecost
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August 5, 2007
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, 2:18-23; Psalm 49:1-12
Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We are continually faced with the want of things. As a child we might ask our parents, “How come Suzie gets to have that and I don’t?” The more toys’ kids have the happier they are, right? Well, this is the same for us too. We’ve just graduated to “big kid” toys. Now instead of Barbies and Legos we find happiness in expensive jewelry and the latest electronics including: iPods, the new Nintendo Wii, and have you seen those new cell phones with the GPS systems in them?

We convince ourselves that we need these things in order to get by. Commercials and businesses thrive on selling these things to us. They know we will continue to buy, and they want to make the biggest profit that they can.

Do we really need a newer, faster, and a sportier car than the one we already have? Do we need yet another pair of shoes to go with that new outfit we bought last week? And really, do we need to personalize M&Ms? Commercials would have us think so and let’s face it – Americans have lots of stuff! And yet we continually want more. In fact, we have so much stuff, we now have a new problem. How do we store it and move it all? A growing industry is in U-Hauls and space savers including: air tight space saver bags, new storage compartments, and even storage centers where you rent an entire space to store your extra stuff.

If we aren’t actually buying stuff, we are figuring out ways to make quick money so we can buy all these things we apparently need. We want a cushion of money and feel that we need all these possessions so we can truly relax. To do this, people are working longer and longer hours, even Sundays, evenings, and holidays to get overtime to get more money. Banks and the stock market offer great ways to invest in your future, so you can hopefully accumulate lots of money. Are we seeing a pattern?

Even better, there are more and more ways to get fast money without even working at all. Lottery tickets, casinos, and even reality TV begs the questions – who wants to be a millionaire? Popular shows such as Survivor and Bib Brother even have people lying to each other in order to make a cool million. Would a million dollars really solve all of our problems? How much money would it take for us to “happy?” Say we win just \$10,000. How long will it be before we want to earn another \$10,000 because we’ve already spent the first?

In today’s Gospel lesson Jesus tells a parable. In it the rich farmer is blessed with a very abundant crop and he uses his wits to figure out where to store all of his goods. He reasons that he can build larger barns so that he can fit everything. Brilliant! In this way the farmer has worked hard in his life to store up enough goods for himself to “Live comfortably.” Now he can relax, eat, drink, and be merry, because he has already worked hard.

Wait! Is this really so brilliant? Jesus didn't think so. In fact, he called the farmer foolish. The farmer stored up treasures for himself so he would be happy, but was not rich toward God. Listen to all the "I" language in verses 17 - 19. The gospel reads "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 let's not be too quick to judge the farmer. We find ourselves in very similar situations and I am the first one to admit it. As I think about the summer ending and needing to get ready to get back to college, I wonder how I am going to be able to fit all of my stuff, in my tiny new dorm room. Will I find myself as the farmer did, looking for extra storage? We are also foolish, selfish, and greedy. We have an abundance of goods that we need to find extra storage spaces for.

We are certainly blessed, just as the farmer was, and we need to realize it. So the question is this: are we truly happy with all of our stuff? Think about it. Are we really satisfied saving up stuff for ourselves? No! However, the cycle of greed is not easily breakable. We can never satisfy our greed, because greed can never be completely satisfied; we will always want more.

This is why it might be common to hear a child saying to his mother, "Mom, I am bored and there is nothing to do," and yet he is sitting in the midst of a pile of toys. We always strive for something new and exciting to keep us entertained. So how can we have all this stuff and still feel that something is missing? When does the cycle of greed and wanting more end? The answers are that God is missing, and it will take living God-filled lives to end the cycle of greed.

Remember back to the farmer. Wasn't the abundant crop he had a blessing from God? The farmer could have done something in return, rather than store up everything for himself? How can we be rich toward God, as the farmer should have done, and turn away from greed and selfishness? We can start by helping others. We are blessed so that we can be a blessing to other peoples.

We can't take all of our belongings to the grave with us, so why not help others and make our stuff useful? There is a distinction between existing with stuff on earth and really living. What good did storing up the crop do for the farmer? Sure, he may have had plenty of food for himself, but what if the food went bad or he passed away? Then the food would have been a waste. This is why Jesus called the farmer foolish.

Sometimes we feel that we need to hold on to our stuff for our own security, we don't want to feel that we are missing anything, or that we will be poor if we give something up. However, I think the following quote captures how we should really approach things: "When you can give something away, even when you don't have much, then you ain't poor. When you don't feel easy giving something away, even if you got more'n you need, then you're poor, whether you know it or not." The family that said this is from poverty-stricken Appalachia; they know true poverty and yet feel that they can be a blessing to others. The truth is we are all blessed enough to give something away. We really are anything but poor.

I realize that I am not poor, and in fact I know that I am very blessed, but it is hard to realize just how blessed I am. While surfing the internet on one of the, yes, three computers in my house, I came across the site: www.globalrichlist.com. This site places your yearly income level on a scale and tells you where you fall in the population of the whole world. I began to say to myself, as a college student, I don't necessarily have a salary. In fact, I'm doing all I can to pay back loans and earn a bit of spending money along the way.

However, I figured that I still make around \$2,000 a year. Okay, \$3,000, if I'm really stretching it. So, I plugged in \$3,000 as my yearly income into www.globalrichlist.com. The results were startling! I am in the top 14.82% of the world at just \$3,000 a year. If I were actually living off of this amount, and didn't have my parent's financial support, I would be considered extremely poor in the United States.

I then wondered where a typical American salary would fall on the global rich list. I typed in \$45,000, figuring that this was slightly above average for an American person. With this salary you can easily afford a nice house, a car or two, and plenty of food. In short, you can live very comfortably. Well! Shock again. A \$45,000 yearly salary places that person in the top 1.72% of the world's wealth! Many people in the United States make even more than this, and have families with at least two incomes.

We have to admit we are pretty lucky when we get right down to it. Other countries are facing problems as severe as hunger on a daily basis. People wonder if they will have enough food for the day. When was the last time we weren't sure if we were going to be able to have a meal or not? The other day I walked into the Camp Hill Giant and was shocked that there are three aisles for just candy alone.

This weekend we are remembering world hunger. According to the Bread for the World website, 854 million people in the world today are hungry. Every day almost 16,000 children die of hunger-related causes. This is equivalent to one child every five seconds.

It is not easy to admit, but when we look at these statistics we can see just how wealthy, and even greedy, we truly are. We certainly have all that we could ever need, but we still want more. The Bible gives several "cures" for this greed. They all basically say that we need to be giving rather than getting. This will help us to lead God-filled lives.

We may feel that world hunger and other problems are far away. What can we really do to help anyway? Well, there might be more that we think. First of all, we aren't trying to save the entire World. But, there are things each of us can do to make a difference. First, we can stop accumulating so much stuff. Go through your closets. If you haven't worn something in a year, consider giving it to someone that needs it. What good will it do you, or others, collecting dust? Don't rent storage units. Try to consolidate everything so that it can fit in your home.

Be modest with your Christmas shopping. Something that has worked in my family is each family member buys each of the other family members just one special gift. In this way there is not a lot of extra stuff lying around and each gift means so much more. We also need to separate our list of needs from our list of wants.

Most important, we need to remember to be a good steward. Being a good steward means being responsible for all that falls to our care. We have a duty then to not only take care of our own stuff, and secure our own wealth, but to share with others. After all, we are greatly blessed.

Let the kids from VBS this week be an example to us. One of their crafts was to make prayer bears. Each child made two bears; one they were able to keep, and the other went to a child in Africa with a prayer book attached to it. These kids certainly shared with others.

Remember, that being rich isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's what we do with our money and possessions that tell us how satisfied we are. If we go back to the question, will we ever be happy? The answer is no. Not if we keep allowing greed to dictate how we live. We can't serve both God and greed.

Unless we are rich toward God, we will never be satisfied.

Amen.