

Luke 12:13-21

July 31, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The mega millions jackpot was almost \$1.3 billion on Friday night, and it looks like someone from Illinois won it – Ed?

Can you imagine? \$1.28 billion – with a b? I can't even fathom that kind of money. It is beyond my comprehension. A million two-hundred and eighty thousand millions of dollars - pretax. That's insanity. That's the whole yearly budget for Lichtenstein – that small country by Germany.

\$1.28 billion. What would you do with that kind of money? Did you fantasize about it this past week?

Normally I would, but for some reason a billion seems like a big burden to carry, doesn't it? That's a lot of money. But, when these big jackpots come up, it's fun to see what our priorities are. Quick – what is the first thing you would do with \$1.3 billion?

Personally - I would get rid of all my debt – house, car, credit cards.

And then that made me think of an older version of the Lord's Prayer – forgive us our debts. Forgive us our debts. And then the thought made me a little uncomfortable – would the mega millions become my savior?

Yeee! That I do not like. I do not like it at all! I guess that's why Jesus so often warns us against thinking that money is our god instead of God being our God, and we see that here today in our gospel reading.

The brother, whom we can assume is the younger one again, is asking that his older brother give him 1/3 of his dead dad's property – assuming there aren't any other brothers.

We could speculate why the older brother is withholding the inheritance, but again that likely says more about us than the parable and you can hash out your theories during coffee hour. That would be very rabbinical of you.

But, the point here today is the question - what is really more important – relationships or stuff. What really gives us security – our wealth or God's unconditional love for us?

And I know we like to compartmentalize – God over there and money over there – but the truth is that we cannot separate the two. We can't separate God and money, because God makes everything, including the stuff that makes money.

And you'll notice that I'm using the present tense. God makes it now, because God is living and active in our lives. God is not our dead Father. We are not living off of an inheritance.

Money was created by us as a tool, because it's easier to carry around than a chicken. God is the Creator of all that exists – including us and our money. God is not a tool for us to use.

The First Commandment is - God is God and you are not. Which means that we are merely stewards of what God gives us. It's not ours. It will be here after we die. It's God's. It's always God's, and how we steward our wealth is how we testify to who God is.

Is God generous or is God stingy? I guess all we need do is look to the cross to answer that question.

In Jesus day, it was believed that the more wealth you had the more God loved you. Jesus is constantly challenging that sin. Sin, because it breaks relationships. As you can see, the wealthy man who hoards his wealth only cares about himself. He's so isolated, in fact, that he only has himself to talk to. Did you notice that?

“I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years - relax, eat, drink, be merry.” He doesn't say it to his family. He doesn't say it to his friends. He doesn't say it to his neighbors. And, he certainly doesn't say it to the poor who are starving outside his gate.

This man in the parable is isolated by his wealth. How sad is that? And on top of that he thinks that his wealth will save him, but then he dies the very next day. And for what? He dies all alone and never “enjoys” his stuff. This was a warning to the younger brother to make sure he values his relationships more than his wealth.

And here is the thing about the word translated as soul. This is important. In Greek, this word is not used in some spiritual sense as it often gets used today. The soul here is just the generic life force that is in every living thing. All plants and animals have it.

When the man, or anything else dies, the soul, the life, just goes away – not to heaven or hell or anything like that. It just goes away. The dead do not have souls because the soul is life.

So, one thing that is really interesting here then is that the lectionary folks left out the section that immediately follows this text, and I think that's a big mistake. So, let me read you Luke 12:22-31.

²² He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,^[e] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep seeking what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that seek all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

The wealthy man who hoards his wealth has it totally backwards. He has become as the nations of the world instead of like Solomon who lived God's will first and then his wealth came to him. The man in the parable is living like the nations instead of in the Kingdom of God.

Solomon, who is the traditional author of Ecclesiastes, our first reading for today, was the most wise and most wealthy of all Israel's kings.

If you remember back to 1 Kings 3, God appears to Solomon in a dream and asks Solomon what he wants now that he is king. Solomon does not ask for riches, long life, nor for the lives of his enemies. Instead Solomon humbles himself before God, says that he is just a child who doesn't really understand anything, and that all he really wants is to walk in righteousness like his father. So he asks God for the ability to discern between good and evil for the sake of God's people – for the sake of God's people.

You'll notice – Solomon is not concerned about himself, but those whom he will govern, those whom he will serve. He earnestly wants to be a good shepherd. So, God gives Solomon a discerning mind and he is the most wise of all the kings of Israel. The Queen of Sheba even comes to learn from him.

It is only after Solomon puts God's will first that God also gives him long life and wealth, but with the caveat that it will all disappear if he turns from God's commandments.

And so, we have Solomon and the wealthy man in the parable set up against one another. Solomon lived a long life and cared for others. The man in the parable only cared about himself and he died as soon as he got his barns built. Cause and effect or merely coincidence - you can decide. Either way, he never got to see it used - by himself or by others.

The Kingdom of God is all about caring for one another, stewarding our gifts, using them in service to others in community. The real issue here is wealth causing isolation versus wealth being used within the community for the wellbeing of all, including the man himself who ends up dying all alone.

Love your neighbor as yourself - love your neighbor while at the same time loving yourself.

This life of yours is a gift - not just for you, but for all the people you encounter, especially for those in need. How often do you see yourself and all that you have as a gift to be shared? You are a gift to the world. And so any time we live as God's gift to the world, in a good way, not a self-absorbed way, we live the Kingdom of God here and now.

You have hands - they can hold someone else's at a difficult time or they can open a door for someone else or they can make a meal for someone who needs it. You have eyes to see what is going on in the world around you. You have a mind for discerning what God would have you do in all situations.

You have a mouth to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and to offer prayers and words of blessings for others. You have ears to hear someone's story. You have a butt so that you can sit with people in all sorts of situations- to laugh with those who laugh and to mourn with those who mourn. You have feet to walk with someone along the way or to go run an errand for them.

You are the gift. You. You yourself. You are God's gift, a treasure, that is put into the world. And the thing about gifts is that they have to be shared. If they aren't shared, they aren't a gift. And it is really fun to share. Don't you think it's fun?

When we are kids we are so generous.

Do you remember coloring a picture and giving it to someone and being so happy sharing it with them? Did you ever read to your parents once you learned how to read because you wanted to share that gift with them? Did you ever use your Easy Bake oven to make brownies for your friends or family?

What happens to us? Why do we stop giving with that kind of joy? Is it from years of rejection? From being told we need to keep our stuff for ourselves, for our own security? Or, is it fear based?

The wealthy man in the parable today is clearly afraid. He was afraid that he wouldn't have enough stuff to survive. His wealth became his savior, so instead of sharing he hoards all that he has. He mistook the gifts of the living God for the inheritance of a dead god.

Now, we can spend a lot of time contemplating why the man was afraid, and again that will reflect more on us than the parable, but it's a good question to ask. Why are we afraid to share? Is it because of our culture, our society, our government?

Whatever it is, God invites us to leave those things behind and live in God's Kingdom instead. Come over here and live over here. Trust God in all circumstances and humbly acknowledge that all we have is a gift and it is meant to be shared with others. We are merely stewards. And when we share what we have with others, we are rich toward God who has already been so very rich to us.

Jesus calls the rich man in the parable a fool. Fool meaning un-wise. What is wisdom? Ladies? Wisdom is walking humbly with God – humbly with God.

We are created in God's image. You and I are created in the image of God – the image of generosity. When we live generously, we live as God's life giving force in the world. We are the soul of the world.

So, let us first live the Kingdom of God here and now, and trust God instead of all of our stuff. God's Kingdom is community, relationships, and alive, not isolation, greed, or death.

You already are the wealthiest you will ever be because of God the living Creator's unconditional love for you. So, go and live as if you have \$1.3 billion to give away, because eternal life, life eternally connected to God is worth way more than that, and it's not a burden. It's a gift.

Thanks be to God. Amen.