

Sermon for 8 Pentecost  
August 3, 2025  
Colossians 3:1-11  
Luke 12:13-21

I'm going to start this sermon with something I almost never use: Bible statistics. I don't use them, in part, because getting wrapped up in Bible statistics can distract us from what's being said. I also don't often use them because, in the words of English politician Benjamin Disraeli, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." We can pretty much make numbers and statistics say anything we want them to say, if we try hard enough; so most of the time, I leave them alone.

Nevertheless, there are several statistics that I discovered when I was working on today's sermon that have a real bearing on today's lessons. Here's the first: One out of ten verses in the Gospels deals directly with the subject of wealth and earthly treasure. Here's the second: Sixteen of Jesus' thirty-eight parables – almost half – are also concerned with how to handle wealth and possessions. And here's the third: The Bible as a whole offers 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 on faith, and more than two thousand on money and possessions.

If you put these statistics together, it's clear that at least in the eyes of Jesus and the framers of the Bible, the power of money and its capacity to take over our lives, to become an idol in place of God, poses a huge problem for us as we seek to grow spiritually and build God's kingdom here on earth. As if the above statistics weren't enough, here's the capper: Jesus said more about money, about wealth and its dangers, than he did about Heaven and Hell put together. Why? Because money, more than any other earthly thing, pulls us away from what really matters: trusting our future and our security to God.

It's not that money, in and of itself, is evil. Everyone knows the Bible verse, "Money is the root of all evil." The trouble is, that's not the way the verse goes. If we turn to 1 Timothy 6:10, what we read is actually "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." That's a big difference. And when we look carefully at our Gospel lesson, we see that Jesus is not preaching against "storing up treasures" in and of themselves. Jesus is not demanding that we all become monastics and renounce all material goods. It's a plain fact, and Jesus knew it, that living in this world does demand that we use material resources to survive. We all need food, shelter, and a certain measure of security and preparation for the unexpected twists and turns of life. Therefore, there's nothing wrong, nothing un-Christian, with

having financial strategies, with planning to protect our families and make sure that our work, and the work of the church, can continue. What Jesus is telling us is that this is not enough. We also need a shift in perception, a realization in our hearts and souls and minds, to help us remember that all that we are, and all that we have, comes from God and needs to be returned to God. Remember what I said a few weeks ago: being a disciple means looking at everything through the lens of our commitment to following Jesus. Financial strategies and planning and budgets don't get us, or God's plan for the world, very far if we don't have Jesus in mind from the beginning.

Even those of us who try our very best to be followers "in thought, word, and deed" can get caught up in the monetary rat race. The message is all around us: you're not OK if you don't have what your neighbor has. You're not OK if you don't have the latest and greatest. You're a sucker if you set aside money for those who need a helping hand. It's only the latest in the merry-go-round of traps that the world sets in our path. What are we to do?

Well, for those of us who are comfortable, or even more than comfortable, in our finances, we need to get off the merry-go-round. We need to stop worrying about what others have and how we can get more for ourselves. We need to learn the difference in our souls between need and greed, and to live in a way that makes sure, in so far as possible, that we are not taking away from others in our quest to "have enough." Because the danger of possessions is two-fold: first, the world seduces us into thinking that we never have enough, that there's always the need for one more piece of clothing or jewelry, one more car, one more book... and we will take care of others "later." And second, we run the danger of being possessed by our possessions. Everything we own has the capacity to put a little hook into us, making us worry about loss, theft, misuse... the list goes on and on. It's human. It's worldly. And it's one of the primary ways – perhaps the primary way – that we lose sight of God and live only in the world.

That's what's happened to the "rich fool" in this morning's parable. Ironically, he's done almost everything right! He has been a good steward of the resources given to him. His flocks and crops have produced abundantly; he is prosperous and wealthy. He is, in fact, to be congratulated for having done well with what God has provided to him. The problem is this: he doesn't turn around and use it for the good of others. Nowhere in his mental conversation with himself does he think about his neighbors, or those in need, or about God. No, it's all about him – he's going to build great big storerooms so that he never has to work again, so that he can be comfortable in his old age. He is truly rich in possessions and poor toward God. And sadly, he never gets to enjoy his success, because he doesn't have an old age

to look forward to. He is, in fact, caught right where Scrooge is caught at the beginning of *A Christmas Carol*, without the redemption that Scrooge finds.

So what are we called to do? Obviously, most of us can't just leave everything behind, or literally sell all we have and give it to the poor. We do have a responsibility to be good stewards of this place, and of our own individual possessions; we do have to make ourselves fit to keep on working and building Heaven on Earth. But we have an equal responsibility, and that's what Paul talks about in his letter to the Colossians. We have to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is," rather than continuing to be seduced by the world and everything the world has to offer us. All of us will die and leave the world and all its things behind. Our call, therefore, is to make sure that we give priority to being "rich in God," rather than rich in the world; to being secure in our relationship with God, making sure, as far as possible, that we put God at the center of our lives and do what God would have us do.

That's a task that will keep us busy for the rest of our lives. But when we try to live this way, the wonderful result is that we find that it's much easier to have a detachment toward worldly things, to see the excesses and "me first" attitude of the world for the vanity that it truly is. When we are rich in God, we will find it easier to neither disdain nor covet wealth and treasure, houses and barns and crops. Rather, we can hold them lightly, able with better grace to keep enough for ourselves and allow the rest to leave our hands and our storerooms and do God's work in the world.

It's a hard path to walk, this attempt to be in the world and not of it, having enough but not too much, caring for God and neighbor as we care for ourselves. Because money is not just money - it's invested with emotions and memories, good and bad, and that it can be used both for good and for ill. Our readings remind us this morning that our ability and capacity to trust in God can grow deeper through life only as we make room for that by letting other worldly things lessen their grip on us. Just as Martha was distracted by much serving two weeks ago, the rich fool is distracted by his success. May we all receive the grace of being able to let go of that which distracts us, so that we can use what remains in God's service. In the words of our collect, may we always be protected and governed by God's goodness, so that we can continue in safety, giving everything its due and giving our lives to God, for love of both God and neighbor.

Amen.