

August 4th 2019
Luke 12:13-21

When Is Enough, Enough?

Good morning St. Mary's. I am currently leading religious services for Soldiers. I want to thank Belinda, Mary Ann, and everyone else who volunteered to help lead liturgy this morning. You are being the church. Second, thank you for bearing with me. I have a pass to come back next Sunday and we will share communion then.

This morning's gospel lesson is an important one for all of us. It hit me hard as I reflected on it this week. Since I will be moving in September, I have started packing up and getting a game-plan together. Even though I have tried to be conscious over the years of what I buy, packing up, I am still amazed at the amount of stuff that I have. I know that I am not alone. Many of us have tried downsizing or have gone through possessions of loved ones who've passed away. One of the most common things I hear people say when this happens is how stupefied, really, they are that we can all accumulate so much stuff.

This seems to be the touchpoint for Jesus in this morning's gospel lesson. The setting is Jesus teaching a crowd of people. At some point during his lecture, someone in the crowd of people stood up and asked him for financial advice on a family inheritance situation. But Jesus wasn't going to be pigeonholed into that role. As much as financial advisors and CPA's can be helpful when dealing with the stock market and the IRS, Jesus still asks us to consider the weightier matters of God like justice, fairness, and what is good and right. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed," he warns, "for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

The author Frederick Buechner observed that the gospel often comes to us as bad news before it becomes good news. I don't know about you, but there is something about hearing Jesus' warning against greed and abundance of possessions that strikes me as bad news as an American in the 21st century? Maybe this is because the truth is, we all have too much stuff. I read news and market commentators during my lunch this week who were frantic about the President's new tariffs on Chinese goods. They claimed these new 10%

tariffs will really start to effect American consumers because they now hit things like cell-phones and toys and clothing, and since something like 70% of the American economy depends on consumer spending, it has serious potential to throw our economy of course.

Whatever we all might think about the President and the appropriateness of trade-wars, it was curious to me that the worry here is that we all won't be able to buy more stuff. I don't think that Jesus was criticizing having things or even having some nice things. But I do think that his warning about our lives not being all about how much we have is even more appropriate for us to hear today. Consider this: in 1970, the average American home size was about 1,400 square feet. What do you think the average home size is today? In 2009, the American Builders Association reported that it was nearly 2,700 square feet - almost double what it was in 1970. This, all at the same time, that the average number of people living in a home has gone down. So, what has filled our homes? Stuff. And the question is, have any of our possessions made us happier, or better, or more faithful to God, or loving towards our neighbor?

I read this week about the late comedian George Carlin. George Carlin had a brilliant ability to use humor, exaggeration, and mockery to give insight into reality. Here is a portion of one of his skits about our modern anxiety over material things. Carlin said this:

You got your stuff with you? I'll bet you do. Guys have stuff in their pockets; women have stuff in their purses. . . . Stuff is important. You gotta take care of your stuff. You gotta have a place for your stuff. That's what life is all about, tryin' to find a place for your stuff! That's all your house is; a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house. You could just walk around all the time.

A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you're taking off in an airplane. You look down and see all the little piles of stuff. Everybody's got his own little pile of stuff.

This, of course, is an exaggeration. A house can also be a home. But what George Carlin is doing in his humor is known as social satire. He is using an ordinary and important and good thing like a home to reveal a bigger folly.

This is also what Jesus is doing in the parable he tells about the rich fool. The rich fool's farm produces so much food that he has an over-abundance. His solution is to build a bigger barn to store it so that he can relax in years to come. While this sounds entirely logical for us today as we invest in retirement funds to relax and enjoy in our future, Jesus calls him a fool.

Remember, this is a parable and parables reveal a deeper truth. The point is that in the end, none of us can take our stuff or our stocks with us. We may be rich in things all through life, but that doesn't mean we are rich towards God.

And so, where is the good news in this?

I think it comes back in the beginning of Jesus' teaching that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions. That's really good news when you think about it. While our neighbors might judge us for how well-manicured our landscapes are; while our friends might judge us for how nicely our homes are decorated; while our co-workers might judge us for the brand of clothing we wear or the vacations we take, God does not. Our lives are not defined by any of it or by any of the abundance of possessions we have. Our lives are defined by God, the God who in Christ has died and rose again and who through his Spirit invites us to live that reality everyday in our baptisms as we manage our money and fill our homes. Each of us is a child of God whether we have a 500 square foot apartment or a 5,000 square foot house.

Eliza is a member of the Anglican Church. If you are not familiar with the Anglican church it is a sister church to the Episcopal Church. For a little context, Anglicans are even more liturgical and traditional of a church than we are here at St. Mary's. She has this book by an Anglican Priest named Tish Warren, titled 'Every Moment Holy'. In the book are a number of prayers and liturgies for everyday life. The power I've found in this prayer book is that it reminds me that God creates and redeems and sustains. That God makes every moment holy. The trouble is we are often distracted and filled with complaint. The book is designed to remind us in prayer of the truth that God is holy and makes our time holy. In this book are two prayers. The first, *A Liturgy for Those Who Covet the Latest Technology*, I'm going to share now.

And the second, *A Liturgy for Those With An Impulse to Buy*, I have printed off for you to take with you for your own prayer and use.

Here is the *A Liturgy for Those Who Covet the Latest Technology*:

*Content my soul in you, O Christ,
who alone are sufficient to my longings.
When my heart is beset by wheeling desire for what it does not have,
remind me, sweet Jesus,
that I have not right to a thing simply because it exists.
The perpetual allure of new innovation
does not negate the call to faithfully steward those resources you have
temporally entrusted to my keeping.*

*Guard my heart therefore against idols of silicon and circuitry,
enticing with slick-veneered promises
of a more sophisticated and upgraded lifestyle.*

Content my soul in you, O Christ, who alone are sufficient to my longings.

The question that this prayer focuses for me is when is enough enough? When is enough enough for us as individuals? As families? When is enough enough for us as a church with an endowment fund of \$1.6 million dollars and when we need upgrades for our building and a significant investment in our children and youth that are vital for the next generation of Christians?

Perhaps the good news in the parable of the rich fool is that Jesus exposes what is foolish in order to give us freedom. Freedom does not exist in stuff or stocks. "For freedom Christ has set us free," says the apostle Paul. For in Christ we are sufficient before God and what we have in Christ is sufficient for our longings.

Friends be free and content in Christ.

Amen.