

**The 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: July 31, 2022**

**Proper 13: Luke 12:13-21: Thou shall not covet!**

**Preached**

**By**

**The Rev. John E. Higginbotham+**

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!**

**This Evening/Morning, I will talk about the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment and the Gospel of Luke 12: 13-21. I want to talk about what we covet. Covetousness is all about the heart's desire. The 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: *God said, thou shall not covet your neighbor's house, thou shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid servant, nor his donkey, nor anything that it is your neighbors.***

**My sisters and brothers in Christ, have you ever stopped to notice the things that you worry about? If you were to make a list of the last three things you are worried about, what would be on it? I ask this question because most of us live insulated lives. We have a place to live. We have enough food to eat. We are not in danger of starvation or homelessness or dying from a simple infection because we can't afford antibiotics. We are insulated from the**

**dangers of extreme poverty that afflict about 689 million people worldwide. That's almost 10% of the world's population.**

**The problems most of us complain about are a little less life-threatening. In fact, our problems are so minimal in comparison to the rest of the world that they have earned a strange nickname: First World problems. First World problems are inconveniences, not threats. They come from having too much of everything and not enough gratitude for anything. All of us are familiar with Third World problems: poverty, hunger, lack of adequate health care, clean water, etc. But what about First World problems?**

**A blog writer nicknamed Cheeky Kid collected a list of "100 Funny First World Problems." I'm only going to read a few of these. I won't ask you to raise your hand if you have ever worried or complained about any of these. But, I think most of us will recognize ourselves somewhere in this list. Have you ever made any of these complaints?**

- My house is such a mess! There's stuff everywhere.**
- My walk-in closet is not big enough.**
- Polishing the marble in my bathroom is such a thankless job.**
- There's too much ice in my iced coffee from Starbucks for \$5 bucks.**
- The portion sizes in this restaurant are too big.**

- **My house is so big that the wi-fi signal is weak in some of the rooms.**
- **There's nothing good on TV right now, with only hundreds of programs and movies.**
- **I can't believe I bought a toaster with no bagel setting.**

**Believe me, those are only problems in the First World!**

**Once again, we are in Luke's Gospel today about a man who suffered from First World problems. And though we may not have the same problem as the man in this story, we may have the same mindset he did. And according to God, that is the biggest problem of all. So, I hope you'll open your mind as you hear our story from Luke the evangelist. Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of people, and someone in the crowd says to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."**

**My sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus is so wise here. He could have easily solved this man's problem. The man would have been thrilled. The crowd would have been impressed. But no one would have learned anything about God. And that is the greatest need any of us have in life. Jesus knows that. We need to remember that the next time we question why God doesn't solve our temporary problems. Jesus didn't come to make our life better; he came to lead us from death to eternal life. In the Book of John, chapter 17 verse 3,**

**John writes, “*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” Read through the first four books of the New Testament. When Jesus doesn’t give people what they want in life, it’s because he’s about to give them what they really need: and that is a greater understanding of God, the Source of true Life.**

**Back to the Gospel. So, Jesus replies to the man, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you? Then he said to them, ‘Take care in other words watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. And he told them this parable: ‘The land of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I will say to myself, “Self, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. *Relax, take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*”’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ “*This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.*”**

**There is something unique in this story in Luke that I can’t find in any other parables in the New Testament. This is the only time in the Gospels when**

**Jesus directly calls someone a ‘fool.’ In Jesus’ stories, there are lots of people who do foolish things. But, this is the only one of Jesus’ stories in which God speaks up and calls someone a fool to his face. As for me, I think this is serious stuff. The Greek word used here for “fool” literally means “without inner perspective.” The Bible contains of whole lists of foolish versus wise living. And the foolish behavior almost always boils down to living without the perspective of God. Fools live only for themselves and only for the moment.**

**My brothers and sisters, ask yourself, do you want to reach the end of your life and have God call you a fool? I didn’t think so. So, why not let’s take a serious look at the difference between fool’s perspective and God’s perspective. The fool saw his wealth as a storage problem; God saw his wealth as a mindset problem. Only in the First World do folks have to rent warehouses to store the overflow of their stuff. If you have a storage problem, you might also have a mindset problem.**

**There is only one way to stop covetousness and the destruction of body and soul that spring from covetousness, and that is to want God so much that we can’t be bothered with inordinate wants for anything else.” There is only one way to change our mindset of more wanting, more wealth, more stuff. And that is in wanting God so much that we can’t be bothered with lesser things.**

**Our love for God creates two changes in our mindset that keeps us from living like a fool. The first change in mindset is an increased sense of gratitude for the things that money can't buy: such as love, faith, hope, peace, joy, patience, kindness. These are the 7 gifts of the fruits of the Holy Spirit that come with finding new life in Jesus Christ.**

**The second change in mindset is a deep desire to share God's love with others in practical ways. That's why you will find that the Episcopal Church has hospitals and orphanages and homeless shelters and soup kitchens all over the world that were started by us Episcopal Christians.**

**A story, I see both mindsets shifts in the life of a man named Joshua Becker. Becker was an Episcopal priest in Vermont. A few years ago, he was cleaning out his garage, piling stuff in his driveway. His son was playing in the front yard alone. And his neighbor struck up a friendly conversation with him. But amid the chit-chat, Fr. Becker made an offhand comment along the lines of, *"The more stuff you own, the more your stuff owns you."* And the neighbor replied seriously, *"Maybe you don't need to own all this stuff."* That comment really stuck with Joshua Becker. He noticed his young son playing alone in the yard. And he wondered why he was working so hard to clean up his stuff when he could have been playing with his son.**

**Not long afterwards, Joshua and his wife, Kim, committed to living a minimalist lifestyle, giving away most of their stuff and cutting back on shopping. Since that time, Fr. Becker has written best-selling books on the minimalist lifestyle. And the Becker's Family have started a non-profit organization called the Hope Effect to build family-style orphanages in Mexico and Honduras.**

**One comment changed Joshua Becker's mindset: "Maybe you don't need to own all this stuff." Once he and his wife began giving away their stuff, they discovered an even greater desire and ability to help those in need. They gained God's perspective on their wealth. Generosity toward the poor is in perfect alignment with the character of God. And aligning our mindset and actions with the character of God is a sure way to avoid foolish living. So, the first reason God called this man a fool was this: he saw his wealth as a storage problem whereas God saw his wealth as a mindset problem.**

**The third thing that made this man a fool was that he talked to himself about his money situation rather than talking to God about it. I will paraphrase verses 17-19 of our Gospel from Luke: *"The rich man thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my***

*surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"*

**The rich man proved himself to be a fool because he lived as if there was no God. He lived as if the highest purpose of his life was the pursuit of his own pleasure. In reality, God is our Creator. We were made by God's hands and in God's image and for God's purposes. Wise people know this and they daily work to align their values, priorities, desires and actions with the character and will of God. Many have seen how the "shackles of wealth choke the life out of people." In contrast, generosity giving, leads to joy and freedom.**

**Here is what stands out to me. Being loved by God and knowing God is to have riches beyond measure. Having all the money you need on this earth is merely having another full-time job. There is no comparison." And the second thing that stands out to me. "Every time we give, we acknowledge that everything we have has been given to us by God. We must follow Jesus' teaching and example in the way we use our wealth because we truly don't deep know it is God's wealth that we are giving back to God's work.**

**My dear sisters and brothers, that brings me to the final thing that made this man a fool: he saw his wealth only as an opportunity for pleasure; God saw his wealth as an opportunity for giving. Here is the challenge for this week**

**and for your life. Let's face it, we only have one shot on this earth. You want to do what you can to advance the Kingdom of God. Whatever it costs to get yourself in a position where you are really using your gifts to serve God is well worth it. You don't want to reach the end of your life and discover that you have wasted it. You don't want to discover that God had a greater plan and a purpose for you than you could ever imagine, and you ignored it. So how do you take on the perspective of God? Give your life to God today and every day when you awake. Jesus the Christ is your Lord and Savior and commit to following Jesus' example in your daily life. God has greater plans for our lives than the pursuit of our pleasure or money. But we will never know what God can do in and through all of us until we trust God with our lives. *AMEN!***