

August 1, 2010

Luke 12: 13-21

Treasure in Heaven

Have you ever said, “If only I could win the lottery!”? “If only some long-lost relative would die and leave me a million dollars!”

“If only I could come up with some brilliant invention or a great idea!”

“If only I could write a best-seller or get discovered for my fabulous talent or discover gold in my backyard!”

We all would like to have more money. We have bills to pay, places we'd like to go, things to do, people we'd like to meet.

More money, it seems, would enable us to do what we've always wanted to do, provide for our children and our aging parents, and just open so many doors!

And there is nothing wrong with having money!

We need money to keep a roof over our head, put food on the table, get an education, etc. We have a money-based economy. We trade money for the things we need, and so we really can't do without money.

The problem about money is this----when is enough enough? Do we ever have enough money? Or do we always want more? Even if we have enough to take care of our expenses, there is always something else we would like to buy or do.

And having a bigger balance in our savings account is always good for making us feel more secure and comfortable.

And so the problem begins---

I used to know a woman who taught school for many years.

Teachers don't make a lot of money and she was very frugal. She lived alone, never married, no kids. So she didn't have a lot of big expenses except her house.

As the years went on, the house needed repairs. But she didn't trust anyone enough to hire them to fix it because she was afraid they would overcharge her and not do the job right. She wanted a fence around her backyard---same problem.

Anything that needed to be done never got done because she was so afraid of losing her money to someone who would cheat her.

So her house became more and more ramshackle, less and less comfortable and safe.

All because she lived in fear of what would happen if she lost her money.

When she passed away, she had more than a million dollars in various banks----she didn't trust any one bank to keep it safe. And her house was falling apart.

When does our desire for money become a hindrance instead of a useful tool in our lives? When do we make decisions to hoard our money instead of letting it work for us?

In this morning's passage from the gospel according to Luke, we heard about a man who had an over-abundance of crops---a huge pile of money if you will. Instead of thinking about other people, he knocked down his small barns and built bigger ones to be able to fit in all of this bounty.

Maybe other people were starving! Maybe there were widows and children who went to bed hungry night after night. Maybe there was a hungry beggar right outside his gates. Scripture doesn't tell us that. It focuses on the man.

He focuses on himself as well. There is only one character in this story---him! He talks to himself. He doesn't ask anyone else's advice or find out from his neighbors if anyone else is in need of food.

He convinces himself that there is a way to hoard it all for himself.

He finds a big enough bank to put all his money in, locked up tight so it will be safe for the day when he needs it or decides to spend it.

Only one problem----he dies before he can eat all that grain, spend all that money!

And he leaves behind all of the bounty that the land provided to him, all the money that he won in the lottery!

All of his hard work, all of the harvest that he took in was not enough to save his life.

These days some preachers are saying that rich people are rich because God has blessed them, that somehow they are special to God and therefore they have been given more than other people----other people who are evidently not as loved by God.

I think rich people are rich because they have built bigger barns to store it all in. But I wonder how that will save their lives.

Bernie Madoff found a way to get rich. Sadly, he did it by ripping off other people, by pulling a ponzi scheme that eventually got him arrested and put in jail. And all those people he was able to victimize because they thought he would make them rich are out of a lot of money.

The desire to make a quick buck backfired on them, and on him.

Bill Gates made his billions by doing things that some people question the ethics of, but unlike Bernie Madoff, he at least did something to earn his money. He became one of the richest men in the world, and for years he kept his money to himself, until something happened.

Somehow he figured it out. There was no way he could ever spend all of his billions. Some day he was going to die and the money would still be sitting in the bank. Someone, his wife, his family, his friends would inherit it, but it wasn't going to do him or anyone else any good while it was still sitting in the bank.

So he started giving it away. He and his wife established a foundation and it supports many causes.

He has made it a priority to do something to improve world health, and one of his biggest causes is to provide mosquito nets to people in Africa to stop the spread of malaria.

Did you know that every minute of every day a child dies of malaria? And the people that manage to recover from it suffer lifelong damage? This disease is so easy to prevent---a \$10 net can protect an entire family!

And recently I heard that there are heroic efforts to provide not only bed nets but also to provide vaccinations and medications.

Money is not the problem. Money can be used to do a lot of good.

The problem is hoarding. It's greed. It's fear of losing money.

It's the desire to have more, more, more!

The landowner that Jesus was talking about was not giving his wealth away. He wasn't using it to help his neighbor. He didn't share it with the poor and needy.

He wanted to keep it all for himself. He was wasting the bounty of the land, the potential of his wealth to do good.

Jesus said, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

The landowner had more than enough. He wasn't doing anything with his riches to bring glory to God or to build God's kingdom.

He wasn't happy having just enough to feed himself and his family. He kept it all for himself---more than enough.

A couple of years ago a story was being sent around on e-mail.

It went something like this---

A woman witnessed an elderly gentleman and his daughter saying good-bye to each other at the airport. The two hugged and kissed and spoke softly to each other. As they moved apart, she heard the daughter say, "Dad, I wish you enough." He responded, saying the same thing---

"I wish you enough."

After the daughter left, the woman's curiosity got the better of her, and she asked the man what that meant, "I wish you enough."

He explained that ever since he was young, his family had said that to each other. They wished each other enough love, enough happiness, enough food to eat and clothes to wear. Enough of everything that makes life worth living.

Not too much. Not more than enough. Just “enough”!

It was always the way he and members of his family said good-bye because you never know when you won't ever see someone again.

Wishing someone you love “enough” is to wish them peace and contentment.

Not having “enough” leads to suffering and struggles---not enough food, not enough love, not enough happiness, not enough money. Any deficit causes problems.

Having too much can also cause problems. Many lottery winners have experienced marital difficulties and other problems with people they love. Many rich people are not really happy for many reasons, including the ever-present desire for MORE and MORE!

I wish you enough. I wish you contentment and peace and happiness.

I also wish for you to know the joy and satisfaction that comes from helping others and from serving God.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, had several directives for his new denomination. One thing he told them was

“Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.”

“Earn all you can”---be industrious, not lazy. Work hard and earn money.

But then what to do with that money?

Well, save all you can!

Don't spend it on things you don't need. Don't waste it or fritter it away. Provide for yourself and your family, but don't go overboard.

So then what? Put it in the bank?? Are we to save it for a rainy day or just to see how many dollars we can pile up?

No, no, no!

What we are to do with the money we earn and save is simply this----

“Give all you can!”

Give it all away! Let today's manna/ money be enough for today. Give the rest away!

Don't build bigger barns or establish bigger savings accounts.

Give all you can!

If the man Jesus was talking about had given all of the harvest that wouldn't fit in his barns away, he wouldn't have had such a problem! He wouldn't have had to knock his barn down and build a bigger one! He would have helped others and saved himself a lot of trouble!

He found out that “You can’t take it with you.” What good did all of that grain, all of that money do him when he was dead? Did anyone even come to his funeral? Who goes to a funeral of a greedy person?

And how many people mourn the loss of someone who helped them when they needed a hand?

I would like to say that this does not only apply to money. It applies to love, to time, to talents.

Some of us can be very greedy with our love, loving only those few family and friends. And time is worse. We often feel we don’t have time to stop and help someone. Maybe we drive right past someone with a flat tire or don’t want to hold a door open for someone who is walking slowly behind us.

And our talents----well, I know a lot of people who won't volunteer to use their talents because they should get paid "big money" for what they can do. They certainly don't want to do that for free!

"Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and everything you need will be provided for you!"

This is the kind of abundant life that Jesus was talking about! The kind of life that's not marked by worries and anxieties about what to eat and what to wear, what will happen in such and such a worst-case scenario, or how to get a bigger and bigger savings account balance!

The abundant life is trusting God to provide for us and not relying on ourselves alone for what we need. It is taking care of others and being taken care of in return! It is giving away all we can---our money, our time, our talents, our love.

Don't store up treasure on earth, where it disintegrates, gets rusty and useless, where it gets stolen or where people can scam you out of it!

HELP BUILD THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT
IS IN HEAVEN!!

Build it right here in San Diego County, right here in Linda
Vista!

Money doesn't do any good locked up in a bank. Give all
you can!

Time doesn't do any good if it is not spent wisely and well.

Talents are given to you by God to be used in service.

And love, most of all, love, is not even love if you try to
hoard it.

Jesus told us that the two greatest commandments are to
love God and love neighbor.

This is what lays up treasure in heaven.

I pray for you to find the way to use your money, your talents, your time, and your love wisely and well to build the Kingdom of God.

I wish you enough, because that is God's desire for all of us.

And I pray that your treasure in heaven will continue to increase.

Amen.