

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 13C

August 3, 2025

Luke 12:13-21

Starving for More

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

Once upon a time, two people were walking along a crowded sidewalk in a downtown business area. Suddenly, one exclaimed, “Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket.” But the other could not hear. He asked his companion how he could detect the sound of a cricket amid the din of people and traffic. The first man, who was a zoologist, had trained himself to listen to the voices of nature. The zoologist didn’t respond to the other man’s question. He simply took a coin out of his pocket and dropped it on to the sidewalk, where-upon a dozen people began to look around about them. The sound made by a coin got their attention.”¹

Rest assured, this is not a stewardship sermon, though I thoroughly believe that issues of gratitude and generosity are central to parish life and a life of faith... and are appropriate at any time of the year. In a few months, the annual pledge campaign will commence when we will gladly be sharing our stories of what the life of this congregation means to us and to the larger community, and of how we plan financially to support the mission... or rather, how we plan to BE the mission... with the gifts we have been blessed with... in our pledge for the coming year. But for today, our gospel lesson is asking us to ponder issues of wealth, greed, and what truly matters in life and in God’s realm of blessing. We might say that we are considering the not-so-savory aspects of money as contrasted with gifts we gratefully offer up to the glory of God. Every Sunday, the offering plate is brought forward to the altar along with the gifts of bread and wine. As we offer back to God the gifts of the earth and the treasure from our wallets, we respond to the statement, “All things come of thee, Oh Lord”... with the words, “And of thine own have we given thee.” Jesus spoke often about wealth and what truly matters... and so we will today.

Debie Thomas, one of my favorite biblical commentators, began her reflection on today’s text with these very honest thoughts:

“When I looked up the Gospel lesson for this week, I groaned, because I really, really, really don’t want to write about money. I mean who does? Money is one of those things we’re not supposed to bring up in polite company. We get squirmy when people ask about it. Especially when they ask in ways that challenge our lifestyles or our priorities. For all sorts of reasons, we prefer talking about Christian virtues that are safely abstract – faith, hope, love, joy. But budgets? Retirement plans? Shopping habits? Tithes and offerings? Those are so specific. So concrete. So private. But here’s the thing: Jesus doesn’t care one whit about our middle class sensibilities. So here we go: money.”²

¹ Synthesis: A Weekly Resource for Preaching and Worship in the Episcopal Tradition (February 6, 1994), pg. 4.

² <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2291-rich-toward-god>

Our gospel lesson is about a wealthy yet spiritually famished landowner who asks Jesus for some assistance in a family matter regarding an inheritance. More importantly, the lesson is about freedom and joy. Jesus' response to the rich landowner who wanted him to intervene in a family matter was blunt: "This very night your life is being demanded of you." Germans have a saying: "Gold goes through all doors except through heaven's gate." In many languages, such as Yiddish, Romanian, Gaelic, and Spanish, the saying goes, "Shrouds have no pockets." You will never see a hearse making its way to a cemetery with a U-Haul in tow. We know well that "You can't take it with you...". But do we live it?

Today's gospel lesson invites us to explore a spiritual dynamic that is all about the attachment, the hold, the grip, that money and possessions can have on us... with a force that draws our attention away from things in life that truly matter. In Greek, the word for greed is "pleonexia" which means "an insatiable desire for more." When Nelson Rockefeller, of industrial fortune fame, was asked how much money was enough, he answered, "Just a little more." No matter how much money was enough, the hunger is for just a little more. I think we all know that inner tug, the alluring voice that says you are not yet satisfied... you need a bit more...

These past few weeks, the Wednesday evening book group, that is being led by St. Barnabas' own in-house philosopher, Michael Fitzpatrick, has been discussing a recently published book by Rowan Williams, the previous Archbishop of Canterbury. In *Passions of the Soul*, Williams writes of these inner pangs as, ironically, a form of starvation:

*"When we live untouched or uncaring in the midst of poverty, diseases, violence, corruption and disaster, we starve."*³

*"What we need in order to live in a balanced, 'reasonable' way within creation is the well-being and flourishing of our neighbours, justice being done to and for them."*⁴

This is not new information. It is, however, a healthy reminder to be had daily.

In our three-year lectionary rotation between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we are, this year, moving through the gospel according to Luke. Next week we will hear the beautiful lesson in which Jesus reminds us that "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also." Next week, Jesus will also give instructions to "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit... for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." What the lectionary skips this year... are the verses in between today's gospel lesson and next week's. That skipped lesson from chapter 12 contains these beautiful words:

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

³ Rowan Williams, *Passions of the Soul*, 2024, Bloomsbury Press, pg. 44.

⁴ Ibid.

worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[d] 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.

Such beauty...

The stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote, “Wealth consists of not having great possessions, but of having few wants.” Just a little over a year ago, I presided at the memorial service of my dear friend Deacon Lani Hubbard. Lani had professed vows as a Franciscan in the Community of Francis and Clare. Vows include commitment to simplicity, fidelity and humility. The vow of poverty is described like this:

The vow of “poverty,” also known as the vow of “simplicity,” reminds us that God’s love is uncomplicated and unconditional. ... Poverty assists us in our approach to others: with the invitation to be open to others and believe that all is a gift from God... a gift to be cherished... We [that is the Community of Francis and Clare] strive to own nothing that stands between us, God, and our neighbor.⁵

In death, Lani is listed on the community’s website as belonging to “The Eternal Community.” In her Tennessean twang, Lani often shared words of St. Clare that shaped her own life:

“Love God, serve God; everything is in that.”

On the other side of spiritual starvation, is the gift of joy... which is distinct from the concept of happiness. Joy is a choice, a practice, a behavior, a state of mind. In contrast, happiness is an emotional reaction to external events, a reaction that comes and goes. Joy is a fruit of the spirit that is grounded in a sense of purpose and meaning... even when finding some purpose or meaning in pain and suffering. In the wonderful book of conversations between The Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, aptly titled *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, Tutu says, simply, “Joy is much bigger than happiness.” In the same book, the Dalai Lama says,

“Joy is the reward, really, of seeking to give joy to others. When you show compassion, when you show caring, when you show love to others, do things for others, in a wonderful way you have a deep joy that you can get in no other way. You can’t buy [joy] with money.”⁶

At the end of today’s gospel lesson, Jesus says to the wealthy landowner, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you.” Jesus is shining light on a spiritual issue just as clearly as the Spirit of Christmas Future shows Ebenezer Scrooge a lonely forgotten grave... a potential end point for a life lived in commitment to earthly wealth without regard to others. The preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says it very well:

⁵ Community of Francis and Clare <https://cfcfranciscans.org/>

⁶ Douglas Abrams, Desmond Tutu, the 14th Dalai Lama, *The Book of Joy, Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, Avery Press, New York, 2016.

“My guess is that every person... has a different purpose, a different way of being rich toward God. Some people really do need to quit their soul deadening jobs and find work that is richer in purpose. But a whole lot of other people could wake up to the purpose that is available to them in their lives right now. One of the saddest things in the world is to talk with someone who believes that what he or she does is small change in God’s pocket, not even worth counting. As far as I can tell, there is no such thing.

“Until then, if you have to be greedy, then be greedy for love. Be greedy for justice, and wisdom, and significance. That way, when it comes time to show God what is in your treasure chest, there won’t be any doubt in either of your minds that you are rich, rich, rich.”⁷

To that fine message, let us together say...

Amen...

⁷ <https://epiphanyseattle.org/sermon/how-to-be-rich-towards-god/>