

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, July 31

"Money and Stuff" based on Luke 12:32-40

We know this story all too well, don't we? Families quarreling over money and possessions after a loved one dies. Maybe this is happening in your family. Our lessons name it things like greed, or coveting, or selfishness.

After my dad died, trust me, I think about what is going to happen to his hard earned possessions quite often. My mom wants to get rid of the things that remind her of the last few months of his life when he was suffering, like the couch he sat on every day. It is a perfectly good couch... it would be an upgrade for us. She was going to replace it and have the furniture people just take it away. I said, we'll take it, if that's the case.

The thing that really got me is when I went camping in Merrill the other weekend with Marcella. I looked in the garage. There I saw my dad's red Dodge Ram Pick-up sitting in the garage with the plow still attached to it. I had a moment. There was dried dirt and salt on it from the last time he plowed. A sign of a life that ended too soon. I wonder what will happen to his truck.

In our gospel, Jesus says, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." If we are honest, most of us in America have an abundance of possessions. Vernice Knudsen, one of our members, said in Bible study this week, "It is surprising how much you can live without." After they found out they had to move some things from a wet storage unit to dry one. She was just thankful for what she and Keith have.

Our first lesson from Ecclesiastes, reminds us that working for the mere accumulation of wealth and possessions turns life into an empty game... vanity of vanities a chasing after the wind... the author says. Literally in Hebrew the word is vapor.

In our Gospel, Jesus is cornered by a younger brother who is quarreling with his older brother over the family inheritance. You know this story. Perhaps he felt the rabbi Jesus could arbitrate their dispute. "Tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

Jesus responds, “Not in my job description.” Jesus saw this as a teaching moment. In Jewish culture, according to Deuteronomy 21:17, the older brother was to receive a double share of the property, which means 2/3 of everything. The younger brother would get 1/3 and wasn’t satisfied with this. He wanted half... more than his share.

Jesus said to him, “Take care, be on guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist of an abundance of possessions.” Then Jesus told the parable of the rich fool.

Jesus said, the land of the rich man produced abundantly. The land produced abundantly. In other words, God gave the growth. Sun, soil, and rain make him wealthy. Sure the man tilled and planted, but the earth produced abundantly. He had such a bumper crop that he had nowhere to store his grain. Like most humans, he craved to hoard the crop for himself. So, in consulting with himself, he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. Then he would have ample goods stored up so he could eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” He would die that night.

The word “I” is mentioned 6 times in this parable. “What should I do?” The man was only thinking about himself. He wasn’t thinking about others, or those in need around him, but his own future.

Jesus is warning against such things... of living completely for yourself... of confusing God’s provision for something you did.

The good news in this text is in the warning itself. We get to overhear Jesus’ teaching to this man who is fighting over possessions. The gift is we still have time, at least today, to reflect on our relationship with money and possessions. Jesus concludes, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” Being rich toward God means generosity... to share our gifts with the world.

After all, how much has God given us? Everything. Especially on the cross God gave God’s own son, Jesus for us. There we receive grace and forgiveness for our self-centeredness.