



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School  
Watertown, WI

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Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

August 11, 2013

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## **“The Father’s Good Pleasure”**

*(Luke 12:32-33)*

Rev. David K. Groth

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*“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy” (Luke 12:32-33).*

## Collect of the Day

Almighty and merciful God, it is by Your grace that we live as Your people who offer acceptable service. Grant that we may walk by faith, and not by sight, in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

In the early church, different regions of the church gravitated toward different Gospels. Churches in the western part of the Roman Empire seem to have preferred Matthew, while those in the east seem to have favored Mark and John. What no one has yet found is evidence of a similar geographical fondness for Luke (*The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, Talley, Thomas, 1986). Scholars have no explanation for this. But if I were a betting man, I'd guess that for many of the early Christians (and probably a fair number of Lutherans today), Luke's Gospel cuts a little too close to the bone. Luke seems to delight in accentuating the most challenging of Jesus' teachings and parables. Have you noticed how difficult the Gospel readings have been these past eleven weeks? They push us outside our comfort zones. Think back.

A few weeks ago we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan-where those highly respected religious leaders, a priest and a Levite, pass by the guy lying half dead in the middle of the road, while a Samaritan, a theological half breed, from whom no one expects anything good, he does what needs to be done for the man, however inconvenient or expensive.

After that, we heard about the dispute between Martha and Mary, where Mary sits and is rewarded and Martha is rebuked for working hard.

Last week we had the parable of the Rich Fool, where a rich man's soul was required of him. He had done nothing illegal. It's just that he was not "rich toward God."

Luke's Gospel is a tough read. Next week we'll hear Jesus say: "Do you think I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division" (Lk. 12:51).

The week after that: “Depart from me” the master says to those who desperately want to get in. He callously resigns them to the place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The week after that: “when you have a dinner, do not invite your friends or relatives or rich neighbors. Invite the poor, the crippled . . .” those who cannot repay you in any way.

Reading Luke is like poking through a bee hive in nothing but your swim suit.

In last week’s Gospel lesson, a man in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” That launched Jesus onto the topic of greed and possessions, money and income. This week’s Gospel lesson is a continuation of that discourse. It’s the same topic, but from a little different angle. It’s about the fear each of us has that we’ll run out of what we need, that there won’t be enough.

The lesson begins with a word of comfort. “Do not be afraid.” It doesn’t come through in the English translation very well, but the Greek says something like, “Do not keep on being afraid . . .” “Do not keep worrying about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. . . Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass, which is alive today and dead tomorrow, how much more will he clothe you!”

So far, so good. Most of us don’t suffer for want of food or clothing. Therefore they are not on the top of our list of fears. So we got out of that one mostly unscathed. Unless, that is, you are disgusted with your wardrobe, and it worries you; well then, that text likely gave you some minor flesh wounds.

But there’s more. Jesus isn’t finished. “Fear not, little flock for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you

the kingdom.” Excellent! That’s Good News! That would be a good place to say “Amen” and we could all go home as smug but happy sinners. But there’s more. The very next line: “sell your possessions and give to the needy.” (That one hurts; we’ll have to come back to it.) And the very last line, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” That is, follow the money, track how you spend your money, and you’ll learn what’s really important to you and what’s not all that important to you. Is God important to you? Is helping a neighbor important? You can say what you want, because words are cheap, but the real truth is found somewhere within the ledger of your checkbook. That one hurts. As people in the south like to say of their pastors, “he just went from preachin’ to meddlin’!”

We could linger on this verse for a while, but that would make this sermon too much of a repeat of last week’s sermon. Last week in Luke 12 Jesus warned us about greed preventing us from being rich toward God. This week Luke 12 is a little different. He’s warning us about the fears we all have that there won’t be enough, that it will be taken from us, or we’ll run out.

One of my members in St. Louis was a hoarder. She had become homebound due to health problems. I rang the doorbell and she called me in. There was stuff piled high everywhere, with thin trails meandering their way through: paper towels and clothing and old canned food and newspapers and cardboard boxes full of who knows what. She was so ashamed and kept apologizing. We visited some about it. It had created problems with her children. At the root of it all was fear. . . . fear that she might need it in the future, fear that she might throw away something that’s valuable, fear that she might run out of something. It wasn’t greed that motivated her hoarding. It was fear.

I wonder if that’s not the primary motive for us all in filling our lives with stuff: not greed, but fear. Fear that we’ll run out . . . there won’t be enough, that we’ll end up destitute and dependent. Maybe we’re all dysfunctional hoarders . . . to a lesser extent for sure, but maybe we’re all

on that same continuum. That is, we're all in the business of trying to secure our own future as a hedge against God's promise to take care of us. Just in case God doesn't pull through, we're going to have a safety net in place, a safety net of stuff that we can use or sell in a pinch. This craving to hoard not only puts stuff in place of God (which is called idolatry), but it also totally disregards the needs of others. With one sentence, Jesus has an antidote for both the idolatry and the neglect: "Sell your possessions and give to the needy."

When I first looked at that, I thought, "That must be hyperbole", the use of exaggeration to add emphasis. But after having stewed on that verse this past week, I'm no longer so sure. It's certainly consistent with what John the Baptist taught. "And the crowds asked him, 'What then shall we do?' And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.'" Moreover, Jesus said the same thing to that rich ruler: "Sell your stuff and give the money to the poor" (Mt. 19:21). In Luke chapter six Jesus says, "Give to everyone who begs from you". And it was also the practice of the early Christians: "They had everything in common . . . There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32ff). The early Christians shared with one another, but not in the same way as the failed communist experiments of the last century. Here there is no compulsion or involvement of the State – only believers are affected, and only goods are shared, not their production.

"Sell your possessions and give to the needy." Notice, he doesn't say sell *all* your possessions, give *everything* as alms. If that were put into practice, all believers themselves would soon need alms. But he does say, "Sell your possessions and give to the needy." Live simply so others may simply live. And it's not just for them. Giving it away tears down the idol.

In the end, we can't take it with us, right? By giving it away now, we're only hastening what will happen one day later. But by giving it away now, you can at least choose to

direct it. Winston Churchill once said “We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.” Give it away, your heart, your mind, your time, your money, your stuff . . . and see what kind of abundance you receive in return.

All the things we possess have been given us by God not just for our own benefit, but also for our neighbor’s. It’s a different way of looking at things. Go home and look at your stuff and ask, “How might this be used in service of my neighbor?” Start with the car. Can you give someone a ride to church, or to a medical appointment? How about that overstuffed pantry; might some of it be boxed up and taken to the food pantry? Or maybe invite that lonely, awkward neighbor over for dinner? Those seldom used things in storage, consider taking this passage very literally and selling them and using the money to send a child to a Lutheran school in the Dominican Republic, or to give a year’s worth of meals to a family in Ethiopia.

After all, your security in this life and for the life to come does not depend on the stuff you own. All that we have, our very lives, is a gift from God, who in his infinite care, created the universe and continues to provide faithfully. He’s not sitting back passively watching it unravel. No, if he attends to the needs of the ravens (thieves and murderers among the birds), how much more will he attend to you and me! He has numbered even the hairs on your head. Therefore, our security lies in God’s faithfulness, not in the stuff with which we surround ourselves.

“Fear not little flock for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” I love that word “give” more than any other. “It is your Father’s good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom.” That’s the best news on earth, isn’t it? It means though we don’t deserve it and cannot earn it, yet God has chosen to give the kingdom of heaven to us. He did this through his Son Jesus on the cross, and all we can do gladly receive it by faith.

You don’t have to do anything to be saved. You don’t have to sell all your possessions and become destitute.

You don't have to perform some heroic deed. You don't even have to believe every part of the Bible to be saved. God really doesn't need anything from you. Your neighbors are a different story, they have needs and you have gifts to share, but still, your salvation doesn't depend on what you give them. Your salvation depends on him. And he has promised, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Thanks be to God. Amen.

BUSINESS NAME  
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