



“Rich Toward God”
Luke 12:13-21 (NRSV)
Rev. Jody Andrade
July 31, 2016

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

What is this scripture about? How to split your inheritance with your siblings? How to save up for a rainy day? Does it offer advice on predicting death? Does it tell us exactly how much is “enough”?

I have a confession to make. If Jesus were my teacher, my rabbi, my friend, I think he would have **driven me nuts**. I appreciate getting an answer when I ask a question. If I say, “Do you want salmon for dinner?” please don’t respond with, “There was once a small fishing village located next to a mountain stream . . .” I don’t want to hear about the fishing village. I want to know if I should make salmon for dinner. We practical people appreciate an authority willing to give us the **easy** answer to our questions. “Will you tell my brother to split his inheritance with me?” Hint, hint, the answer is “Yes, share with your sibling!” Instead, Jesus says, “Who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” Well, my answer to that is, “Um, GOD set you to be a judge!” If Jesus would just tell us exactly what to do, give us a simple yes/no answer to our questions, life would be so much easier, wouldn’t it?

This Jesus, however—this Jesus UNDERSTOOD what the man was *really* asking. Jesus recognized that the man *was right there in the presence of the Son of Man* and rather than bathing in the light and joy that must envelope you in the presence of God, this guy . . . was

worrying about finances. Jesus saw how terribly sad it was to be so focused on material possessions that you miss out on seeing the Kingdom of God. How heartbreaking.

When we pepper him with questions, Jesus doesn't TELL us the answer. Instead, he is a STORY TELLER. We listen to the parable and then we are to decide for ourselves. Jesus recognizes it's in our nature to look for the easy, simple answers. Why think deeply, engage all of our heart and mind, dig deep and really follow God—when we can just tweet out the easy answer in 140 characters or less? The Old Testament tells us God's people insisted on judges and then kings to rule over them because they didn't want to do the real work, make the tough choices themselves. Though the Apostle Paul assures us the law is written on our hearts, that we KNOW deep down what is right, its human nature to ask for the easy answer. Jesus sees that we are *unable to see the bounty of life that lies right in front of us* because we keep getting in our own way.

Here's a crazy idea: Jesus wants us to be happy! He wants us to embrace what is good in life, to spend our energy ensuring that all have abundance. This story is a wakeup call to the questioner. Jesus is saying, "I'm not answering your question because you aren't getting the point of life. *I don't have one simple answer to make you happy.* BUT . . . I can tell you a story about living. Open your eyes! Rather than embracing your brother and enjoying the richness of family life, you are focused on your inheritance. Wake up and see the richness of life that's right in front of you!"

In my last church position I was the "stewardship person"—I paid attention to pledges and giving and generosity. I can't even count the number of times people would ask me detailed questions about tithing. "Tithing" is the practice of giving the first 10% of what you make to the Kingdom of God. Again and again I was asked, "Does tithing mean 10% of my income *before* taxes or *after* taxes?" Here, today, I am finally sharing with you the simple and correct answer to that question. Listen closely.

"The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

How much is enough? You cover your basics, food, clothing, shelter, safety. You want a nest egg for a rainy day—savings in case there is some kind of unanticipated cost like a broken down car, a lost job, or a health crisis. So: food, clothing, shelter, safety, kids' future, and some savings. Do you feel secure with \$1K in the bank? \$10K? \$1M? How much is enough? Let's say you enough to have your needs met, have a little fun, and spare money in case of a catastrophe. "Sorry God, but I just need to get all of this squared away before I tithe. Once I've got that amount—that amount that absolutely makes me secure—THEN I'll tithe.

Work hard. Stay late, put in the long hours, sacrifice to get the promotion, to earn that bonus. Sure, you'll miss reading to the kids before they go to bed, but you need to get "enough." Maybe you won't get to go on that trip with your husband to see grandpa, and you'll miss the moment your daughter's eyes widen in delight when grandpa tells her those extra-long fingers on her hands are a special family trait and just like her great grandfather she'll be good at milking cows and maybe even become a surgeon!

Back at the office, your impossible hope is that if you spend most of your energy tightening your fist around those extra dollars that make you feel secure, you'll be safe from catastrophe. Could it be that missing all of those tiny, dear moments with those you love is one long, slow catastrophe in the making? Is it possible that Jesus is speaking to us, today when he says, "Take care. Be on guard against all kinds of greed." Is Jesus in this particular scripture on this particular morning gently shaking you by the shoulders and saying, "Hey! Refocus! You're missing out on life's riches!"

Former Dean of the Chapel at Duke University Will Willimon, in his new book [Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love](#), writes that the more you have, the more fearful you become.¹ Have you thought about the full cost of having things? There's the dollar cost of the thing, the time investment cost of finding just the right thing, the cost of maintaining the thing and the cost of worrying about the thing. All that worry about a possession can turn a guy from looking like Sméagol to looking like Gollum. All of that fretting and worry over a possession is costly. In J.R.R. Tolkien's world, it turns a hobbit into a monster. In Duluth, all that worry can turn a lovely guy into the patient in hospital room #304.

Self-designated truth teller and Momastery blogger Glennon Doyle Melton writes about the two times she and her husband made the choice to give generously—wildly generously, beyond their means, wiping out their savings. She says "For the first time in our lives we felt secure.

¹ Will Willimon, *Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 26.

When you give it all away . . . it's impossible to lose whatever it is that you can't live without."²
When you give it all away, it's impossible to lose whatever it is that you can't live without.

Jesus recognized the freedom and joy to be found in living richly toward God. Exact tithing percentages, inheritance amounts, and the fancy things of this world all get in the way of living a full life, rich toward God.

The musician Prince died unexpectedly this year. He died without a will and left behind millions of dollars over which his family is still quarreling. When he was alive, Prince often supported struggling musicians and school programs anonymously. On April 21st Prince did not know that "this very night your life is being demanded of you." What if he had? Imagine the joy he could have felt giving away millions more to programs in which he believed. What satisfaction he would have gotten from seeing an artist blossom or a child pick up an instrument because of his support. What a rich life it would have been for him to see his money doing good, sharing his God-given passion for music with others.

The people killed in terror attacks all over the world these past few months are too numerous to name. This collage from a recent New York Times article depicts terrorism deaths from several weeks in March. What if these people had known that "this very night your life is being demanded of you"? How lovely it would have been if they could have chosen to spend their last hours, their last days, even their final year experiencing life at its very fullest, living rich toward God.

Last week at the British Senior Open in Scotland, one player walked through player dining and recognized an old friend, another player who was sitting at a big table with his family. The first player said, "Hey, it's great to see you! How are you? How are things?" and the second player replied, "Not so good. High score today. Five over par."

The first player replied, "Oh, but things are good. You have your family with you." Or in other words, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

God's kingdom cannot be stored up, it cannot be saved. The kingdom is ours to enjoy if we will just make life-giving decisions about how we spend our finances, our time, and our focus. During Crosby Cline's baptism last week, the water was poured over him and he was soaked in grace. We are meant to be God's walking wet, with grace dripping off our fingers, pooling around our feet. We can't earn this grace and we can't bottle it up for later. If we will but open

² Glennon Doyle Melton, *Carry On Warrior*. (New York: Scribner, 2013), 251.

our ears we can hear the wisdom and truth in today's parable. If we will but open our eyes we will see the Son of Man standing right in front of us. In the Kingdom of God, there is no drought: water is everywhere. Today and every day, may we be rich enough to splash one another, until we are all soaking wet. Amen.

Children's Sermon

Once upon a time there was a boy named George who was bananas crazy over the top nuts about . . . Legos. He was super-duper crazy excited one Christmas when he got –ONE LEGO—in his stocking.

George didn't actually PLAY with the Lego. Instead, he held that Lego super tight in his hand. He didn't want to lose it! No matter where he went, he always had it with him and he watched it carefully to make sure it didn't disappear. When other kids asked him to play, he'd say "Sorry, I can't. I have my very own Lego and I need to make sure I don't lose it."

One day his dad had some errands to run and he took George with him. George held his Lego in his hand and watched it carefully so he wouldn't lose it. They drove and drove for what seemed like hours to a faraway kingdom called "ITP" which stands for "Inside The Perimeter." George didn't even see when they crossed the border from Outside to Inside the perimeter because he was watching his Lego, making sure he didn't lose it.

They went to a special island in the kingdom of ITP where the Golden People shopped—it was called: Phipps Plaza. But George didn't notice the fancy marble or the glass elevator that whisked them up to the third floor—because he was holding tightly to his Lego and watching it closely so he wouldn't lose it.

George didn't even look up when his dad took him by the hand and led him into the Land of Legos. Finally, George's dad noticed that George was just staring at his one Lego.

Part of a dad or mom's job is to show their child all that the world has to offer. So George's dad said, "Hey George! Let go of that Lego, look up and see what's around you!"

George dropped his one Lego and looked up, and his eyes almost popped out of his head! Everywhere he looked there were Legos! George soon had his hands all over hundreds of Legos and discovered that the richest part of life is just waiting for you if you'll look up and unclench your fists. Amen.