

8th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 13, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on August 3, 2025

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 / Psalm 49:1-11 / Colossians 3:1-11 / Luke 12:13-21

*Let us be wise and ponder these things,
and consider well the mercies of the Lord. Amen.*

I can't remember why so many of my siblings were at my house and in my kitchen one afternoon when I lived on San Luis Drive, but I'm going to share a family moment. For some background: all of my siblings and I have lived many places with many different climates. We've lived in rural places, urban places, inland place, on the coast and places in between.

So, 2 of my sisters, my brother and his wife and I were all in my kitchen in the San Luis Drive house getting ready for a meal. My sister-in-law criticized in the form of a question:

Why is your pantry so full? Why do you buy things in bulk? You live alone.

My response was:

What if there's a blizzard?

She scrunched her face and quizzically and incredulously said, "*Blizzard?!*"

And *all* of my siblings responded in unison:

Yeah! What if there's a blizzard?!

Yes, there are items that I use frequently that I store up. It's partly because I don't want to run out and be caught off guard. But it's mostly because the per-unit cost of many pantry items is not a few cents more for the smaller container, but often

2x or 3x the per-unit cost than the bulk version. I will point out, however, I do not have a Costco card – I do not need a box of Fig Newtons the size of my torso. I have limits! I will *not* pull down my barns and build larger ones!

The context of today's Psalm and Gospel story is greed. The rich man wants what he is not entitled to, and for some reason he wants Jesus to facilitate and legitimate his greed. He wants more, more, more. The average American – you and I – could very well take the place of the rich man: Jesus is speaking to us. Even the most minimalist person here has more than they need. We surround ourselves with material goods and financial wealth to make ourselves feel good, to feel important, to show off, to feel safe ... and a lot of it is simply *vanity*.

Aside from basic food and drink and other consumables like fuel and utilities, I'm sure every person here could live out the rest of their lives without buying another thing. But we're going to! Because, like the rich man in the Gospel, and like the Teacher in the OT, we always want more.

Madonna – the singer, not the Mother of Jesus – wrote a song called *More*. The beginning of the song is gentle and wholesome:

*Once upon a time I had plenty of nothing,
Which was fine with me
Because I had rhythm, music, love,
The sun, the stars and the moon above,
Had the clear blue sky and the deep blue sea.
That was when the best things in life were free.*

And then it gets a bit more ... American, shall we say:

*Then time went by and now I got plenty of plenty,
Which is fine with me.
'Cause I still got love, I still got rhythm,
But look at what I got to go with 'em.*

Jesus says a lot about money and material possessions in the Gospels. But Jesus didn't have a problem with *wealth*; He had a problem with *greed*. And as uncomfortable as is to use that word in relation to the mass consumerist culture of the United States, it is an accurate description of the average American lifestyle. Our obsession with amassing money and things not only shapes our culture, but it shapes our individual brain chemistry, our moods, our psychological well-being, our physical well-being and our personalities. I'm not going to cite the studies, but they are out there.

What Jesus emphasizes today is that your money and your material wealth should be a part of our spiritual journey. This isn't about tithing, though; it is about the spirituality of personal wealth. This is truly about your relationship with God and what it means to live a life preparing for the Kingdom of God through what we learned from Jesus last week: *The Lord's Prayer*. Your financial and material wealth and what you do with it should be seen through the lens of:

*Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in Heaven.
Give me today my daily bread.
Forgive me my sins as I forgive those who sin against me.
Or: forgive my debts as I forgive my debtors as one translation goes.
And lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.*

The Greek philosopher Socrates said:

*He who is not contented with what he has,
would not be contented with what he would like to have.*

How true that is! How do we become content with what we have, because we already have too much?! We already live where the best things in life are free:

*Rhythm, music, love,
The sun, the stars and the moon above,
The clear blue sky and the deep blue sea.*

All right on our doorsteps!

Last week, Jesus gave us The Lord's Prayer. It's an all-sufficient prayer that has us asking only for what we *need*. The Disciples had pleaded with Jesus: *Teach us to pray*. And in my sermon last week, I shared the struggle I have with my prayer life outside of formal worship. Like that struggle to pray that you have, too, it's a struggle to be content with what you have. It's a spiritual principle to be content with the basics. But the *journey* is more difficult when the culture around us not only legitimates financial and material excess, it judges us by it.

The lyrics to Madonna's song continue:

*Each possession you possess
Helps your spirits to soar.
That's what's soothing about excess
Never settle for something less.
Something's better than nothing, yes!
But nothing's better than more, more, more
Except all, all, all
Except once you have it all
You may find all else above
That though things are bliss,
There's one thing you miss, and that's
More!*

More! More! More! It keeps repeating in gleeful excess until the song fades. But: What in the natural world has the sole purpose of growing for growth's sake? What in the natural world has the sole purpose of growing for growth's sake and has no other purpose than growth?

Cancer cells!

And that's what the neverending pursuit of money and material wealth is: a cancer on our souls. This cancer is cultural, and it has eaten away at our appreciation of those best things in life that are free, including our interpersonal relationships ... like a cancer.

Again, this isn't about condemning the wealthy. It's about curbing our greed, our desire to amass more, the tendency to judge a person's character and importance on their material wealth. There is nothing spiritual about that, nothing heavenly, nothing about "*Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.*"

So we work on it; we pray about it; God forbid, we even *talk* about it! We can *talk* about what our pursuit of material wealth is doing to us! At the 2018 General Convention of The Episcopal Church, the Task Force on Theology of Money¹ was created. It consisted of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay persons, who represented the cultural and economic diversity of the Church.

They found in their work that the most common words associated with money were *cash*, *security* and *a necessity*. However, another association was *power*. Those associations should give you fodder for deep reflection on money as part of your spiritual journey.

The report to the 2022 General Convention was laid out in the form of our Sunday Eucharist, because:

Our liturgy is, at its core, an expression of the theology of gift and giver, of blessing and abundance.

While the report was very long, it was interesting how the Committee reflected on the parts of our liturgy as they might pertain to money. The opening of our liturgy drew them into defining what we're doing. That's what we do when we gather:

¹ <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/30034>

Almighty God, to You all hearts are open.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts...that we may glorify You for ever.

So, at the beginning of our spiritual journey with money and material wealth, we define what we are doing by asking:

*How does your encounter with money, finance, and economy
animate and inform your pursuit of the Kingdom of God?*

We ask that as the Church, as a parish and as individuals.

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animate and inform your pursuit of the Kingdom of God?*

Of course, the Confession draws us into the obvious and growing economic inequality in our country and our city. We are full participants in our economic system that is disproportionately geared toward the wealthy, yet Jesus in the Gospels and YHWH in the Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly point our concerns toward the poor. And when we witness this inequality, what do we do? We hoard...like the rich man...in case there's a blizzard. The report found:

[T]he realities of living within a culture that highly values income and wealth creates a personal need to hoard financial resources for fear of scarcity and/or decline. In turn, that reduces the amount and frequency with which those individuals make charitable gifts, including to those causes and institutions that implement God's work.

So, they ask:

*As we confess our sins, we ask... How do our economic practices
liberate or enslave us?*

Which leads to the Offertory when we consider how to align our money with our mission and acknowledge, as we do at the Offertory at the 8am Service:

All things come of You, O Lord, and of Your own do we give You.

Ultimately, understanding money and material wealth as a spiritual issue, part of your spiritual journey, is to align it with the Baptismal Covenant. How do you use your material and financial wealth to:

- *Continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship*
- *Participate in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers*
- *Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ*
- *Seek and serve Christ in all persons*
- *Love your neighbor as yourself*
- *Strive for justice and peace among all people, and*
- *Respect the dignity of every human being?*

That is the ongoing reflection and prayer that should be a part of your spiritual journey.

And then, as we come to the altar, having given thanks for all that Jesus has done for us in the Eucharist, we must remember that it is God who feeds us, and that the Eucharist is our call to mission, to participate in the Coming of God's Kingdom, and to give thanks for the gifts God gives us for that work, including money.

Jesus says to the rich man:

*Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed;
for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*

The sooner we learn that, the better we will be able to see that the Kingdom of God is near.