

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, August 30, 2009

✠ ✠ ✠

Hymns: 347, 421:1, 425, 428, 430:1-4.

Lessons: Ecclesiastes 2: 18-26, 1 Timothy 6: 6-12, Luke 12: 22-34.

Text: Luke 12: 13-21.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Every one of us has experienced some situation where we thought we weren't getting our fair share, or something that we thought belonged to us. In our text someone thought that Jesus should make his brother share.

Jesus responded by saying "Take notice, and guard against coveting." Jesus had been preaching to a large crowd, a crowd of "thousands". That's when somebody from the crowd called out a demand. He said, "Teacher, get my brother to divide my inheritance with me." He apparently hadn't been listening carefully to Jesus.

Then Jesus told a parable, which is known as the parable of the rich fool. The main character of the story is called a "fool" not because he was a stupid man. He had been successful and obviously he was a pretty good farmer. Because he was good, he had a lot of money and "stuff". Then he is blessed with an abundance at harvest, so he worries about where to put all his crops. He did not say, "How can I share what I have with others, since I have more than enough?" He said, "I need more storage space for my crops!" His conclusion to his problem was: I will tear down my barns and build even bigger ones. Then I can store up all my goods and go into an early retirement. *"And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"* But God said, "Fool! You will face judgment tonight." Today, from the word of God, we must be reminded:

BEWARE OF GREED!

- 1. Coveting is a sin.**
- 2. Our times are in God's hand.**
- 3. Let us be "rich toward God!"**

What is coveting? In the 10 Commandments we have 7 commandments about our relationship to man. Two of the 7 concern coveting. They are the only commandments about our thought process, and because of that, they are often at the root of other sins. We read in Exodus 20:17 *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."* Coveting is an evil desire for something that does not belong to us. It is not a sin to want something and save up to buy it. Simply wanting something is not coveting. But coveting is an unhealthy desire, a sinful lust that leads to other sins.

In our world today, anyone who is worth a lot of money is honored and thought of as great and wise, while those who are content with their lives are often downgraded as "losers".

Coveting is difficult to fight because it is a sin of thoughts rather than action. So someone can appear to be outwardly pious and yet be inwardly full of sins like anger, revenge, and covetousness. Coveting can cover an enormous range of things. King David coveted another man's wife; that led to adultery and murder by proxy. David repented and the psalm we sing for the offertory is his confession of sin and his trust in forgiveness through the promised Messiah. God allows the great to fall into sin to show that all people are frail and sinful. Some repent and seek forgiveness. Others fall into greater sin and harden their hearts against God's Word. Some people develop an evil desire for money, others for property, others for another person's life-style, or spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend. The parable Jesus taught is perfect for our society, because the world usually

motivates people to work harder by encouraging them to covet greater riches. The lotteries and all forms of gambling all work at making us covet a life we cannot have simply by working for an honest wage.

A child of God accepts God's gift of salvation in repentance, a turning from worldly values and personal greed to honesty, generosity, and contentment with what one has. The personal life-style of the Christian is made up of attitudes and values, activities, conduct patterns, goals, and specific uses of material possessions that are consistent with the Word of God. The world insists that the good life consists of accumulating possessions and indulging in luxuries.

The rich man's crops had been blessed by rain and sunny days, but he didn't realize that was God's doing. The man's confidence was in himself, his wisdom, his accomplishments, the money he had managed to accumulate, the things he had stored in his barns. Confident in himself, he had no reason to think things would ever be different. But, according to Jesus, things got different. The year finally came when the man was going to bring in a bumper crop, a once-in-a-lifetime crop, the kind of crop that other farmers could only dream of. Then he realized he had too much crop and too little storage. Being a shrewd businessman, the farmer realized: I've got a problem here, but it's the kind of good problem which is easily fixed. He said: I'm going to tear down my barns and build bigger barns, big enough to store all my grain and all my goods. Then, when everything is done, I'm going to say to myself, "Congratulations, self! You have all the money and all the things you're ever going to need. It's time to kick back, relax, to eat, drink, and be merry." In a fairy tale, he would have "lived happily ever after". But this story isn't a fairy tale. This is Jesus speaking, and the man didn't live happily, or unhappily ever after. Jesus finished the story of the rich fool, and made His point about money and possessions with this ending: God said to the first-rate farmer: Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have saved up and prepared and hoarded, whose will they be? The man wasn't a fool because he was smart, or because he was rich. He was a fool because he thought being smart, making money and getting things was the beginning, middle, and sum total of life. It's a thought which sounds great until death shuts it down.

Of course, you might say, "That's a story, a parable. We know things don't actually happen that way." Really? We could look at the ancient city of Pompeii. We can read that there the corpse of a woman was found who appears to have been overcome by the rain of ash which fell from the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD. In the woman's skeletal hands were jewels, perfectly preserved gems. She still held on to the jewels when death grabbed hold of her. She learned the time will come when valuable possessions don't help one bit. And then there is the August 1, 2007 collapse of a bridge carrying an interstate highway in Minneapolis. Thirteen people's lives were required of them in a most spectacular way. And sudden death happens to thousands every day. The story has been told of the chief accountant of one of the wealthiest men who ever lived: John D. Rockefeller, Sr. Mr. Rockefeller was a very smart, shrewd man. Supposedly when someone asked him: "How much money is enough money?" John D. is said to have replied: "Just a little bit more." Well, he, like all of us, eventually died. As his vast estate was being settled, someone inquired of his accountant: "Just how much did he leave behind?" Without a moment's hesitation, the accountant answered, "Everything!"

That you are, someday, going to leave everything behind, including your money and all your possessions is a truth which cannot be denied. That's why Jesus wants you to know that having money and possessions is OK as long as it doesn't displace God from your heart. That's right, there's nothing wrong with possessions. But don't, not for a moment, think that being rich in money and things can be a suitable substitute for being rich in your relationship with the Savior. Don't delude yourself into thinking that whatever you have accumulated here will be with you in heaven or hell. Don't lie to yourself as did the rich fool.

Foolish is the proper description of this man. In this parable, the man is foolish because he has planned for retirement but not for eternal life. No one mattered to him but himself. What good would those treasures do when facing the eternal God? Anyone is a fool who is not rich toward God. ***"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."***

But how do we become rich toward God? The rich man was not rich toward God. All our possessions need us to look after them. We have to guard them, lock them up, put a fence around them, insure them, and still they break, disappear, or rot. One man said those goods are such a weak god that they cannot even cure a sniffle. Yet nothing is worshiped and held in greater respect by unbelievers than material goods.

We can be rich toward God only through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom only through the Word and never apart from the Word. We can become rich toward God through worship, through personal study of the Word, and by the way we use our time, talents, and treasures.

Christ showed that life is fulfilling only when we seek to extend His kingdom by loving, serving, and giving to others. Jesus' teachings and His life-style denounced getting wealth as the aim of life. He reminded His followers that owning material riches is temporary; spiritual riches are eternal. Money and possessions are to be used in spiritual service.

Even our relationships can be rich toward God in many ways. Does someone need a visit? Does someone need encouragement from the Word of God? Can you visit? Can you write a letter filled with encouragement from the Word of God?

Luther often emphasized that we serve Christ by seeing Christ in our neighbor. God created us and brought us into His Kingdom to do good works, not to glorify ourselves but to glorify Him. Because good works are the result of salvation and not the cause of salvation, we can enjoy the blessing of thinking about others first.

That is especially true of what we do for our children, not in giving them things, but time and the Word of God. Parents should realize that no good work is more blessed by God than the care and concern shown children. Whatever time, attention, and love is shown to them, they will return ten times over and keep giving it forever. If they do not, it goes against them and not their parents.

In a sense, God gives us a chance to live life all over again with our children. We can do many things with them. But best of all, we can be rich toward God in teaching them his Word, and seeing in them the fruitfulness of the Gospel.

You heard in our epistle lesson: ***“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”.*** 1 Timothy 6:6-11.

Money itself is not the root of all evil. Love of money, love of possessions, love of anything which displaces God; which overshadows the Savior; which overpowers His grace; which overrides His plans and His life-giving intentions for you, is the root, trunk, branches, and leaves of all evil. If you doubt me, read the Scriptures, look at your neighbors, watch tonight's evening news. Take a close look at the rich, the powerful, the famous, and ask: Do these who possess everything the world can offer, possess anything of permanence? Who can argue that, on the Day of Judgment, fame and fortune, influence and affluence, will be forgotten and having Jesus as your Savior will be everything. Today the Holy Spirit calls you away from the sinful foolishness of following money, possessions, anything which says it can replace the Savior Jesus Christ; from any lifestyle which says God is deserving of your leftovers. Today the Holy Spirit encourages you to look at Bethlehem's lowly manger, and the cross on which your Savior Jesus Christ died, and the Savior's empty grave. Look and believe on God's Son who took your place under the law so you might have a place in heaven. Believe in the one who resisted Satan's temptations so you might be given Divine redemption; who died so you might live; who lives so you might never die. By the Holy Spirit's power let your faith in Jesus Christ be nourished and grow. He is God's great Gift, Your gracious Redeemer. This is the truth of Scripture. Having Jesus as your Savior, as your Redeemer, is real riches indeed. Amen.