

"More Stuff"

Luke 12:13-21

December 6, 2020

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### Call to Worship

The culture in which we live trains us to accumulate and to hoard and to attempt to secure our lives through our possessions. **Jesus teaches us a very different way to live in the world, a culture in which we realize that we cannot secure our lives through our accumulation.**

Jesus promises us that, in his service, we will prosper – **though we may not prosper as the world judges prosperity.** Approach with joy and gladness.

### Prayer of Invocation

Creator God, we have sown, we have gathered, we have stored, we have rested. All things in our lives of work and play are in order. Wise fools are we, who fail to recognize that at any moment we may be called to account. **Now, humbly, we acknowledge that the land, the resources, the products, and most of all the treasure we find in humanity close at hand and far away, all these are yours. May we think of ourselves less as owners and more as stewards. Lord, we ask you to join us this morning in our understanding of your wishes for us. These things we pray in your name. Amen.**

### The Word

Someone from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." **Jesus said to him, "Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?"**

Then Jesus said to them, "Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions, even when someone is very wealthy." Then he told them a parable: **"A certain rich man's land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here's what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That's where I'll store all my grain and goods.**

I'll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself. But God said to him, 'Fool, tonight you will die. Now who will get the things you have prepared for yourself?' **This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God."**

### Living the Word

Turn and look at the person on your right; now turn and look at the person on your left; these words are for the person in-between them. This one's for you!

*From the book of Luke: Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."* Often rabbis of that day served as mediators in such disputes, and so this man approaches Jesus as he would a leader of the Jewish community.

The details of the brother's conflict is not clear. Often in the ancient world families kept their property together and shared its resources for business purposes, even though technically they each owned their own portion of them. Did the brother want out of a family business so he could take his share and go out on his own? It should be noted that the brother really does not want a fair judgment from

Jesus, but instead an advocate to speak for his own side on the issue: *"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* This may have been Jesus' clue that there was a danger of greed in the situation.

*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."* Jesus refuses to judge between the two brothers. He has not been appointed their judge. Even so, he doesn't pass up the chance to turn the request into an opportunity for instruction:

When Jesus makes this warning, he has more in mind than financial buildup. If Jesus were alive today he would see the attitude behind the expression "The one with the most toys wins" as a prescription for failure in life. When possessions are the goal, people become pawns. In fact, a reversal of the created order occurs, as people, made in the living image of God, come to serve dead non-images. It is this turning inside out of the created order that makes greed such a dishonorable sin.

*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.'*

Can you just envision it; a person sitting on a big pile of stuff, planning where to keep all of it. Fat and sassy...proud of all that they have acquired in life...and having it all wrong.

I want to share a news article about what can happen when the pile spills over: **Hoarding Couple Found Trapped In Home:** An elderly couple has been hospitalized after they were discovered trapped by piles of their own possessions and debris in their home, a case of hoarding gone awful. A 75-year-old woman and her 76-year-old husband were hospitalized last night in critical condition though their conditions have improved since.

Authorities discovered the couple after a neighbor, reporting a foul odor, and asked for a well-being check from the authorities. The couple was found buried under mounds of debris and might have been trapped there for as many as two-to-three weeks. Conditions were such that authorities investigating the home had to wear haz-mat suits to enter and the woman suffered what appeared to be rat bites. The home was described as having junk/debris/possessions "stacked from the floor to the ceiling in the basement and first and second floors. The district police Lt. said the building will likely be condemned.

I hope you are considering your piles, your stuff and know that for you, your collection of stuff is not that bad... I hope you are not living in thread for your life, but how much is there around you? You may have it hidden from the world, but God sees it all: the piles, the heaps. God knows all about us. Like a bad cop movie we hear from a megaphone: "Let go of the stuff and walk away and no one will get hurt!"

God doesn't command or demand our obedience, God invites us into a relationship where we find God's wisdom to be a better way to live. *But God said to the man in the parable, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'* We get to choose what we will do. We get to decide!

Imagine if you were the Old Testament Father Abraham, or Mrs. Abraham if you prefer. They were called by God to be Nomadic people; to leave their home behind and follow God into the desert; knowing they could only carry a small amount of their stuff on the camels.

They still survived. They might have had a much bigger tent than we would take with our family if we were going camping, in fact they may have had many camels. I wonder how they decided what to take. I wonder how many camels I would need to carry all that I think I couldn't give up or live without? And what about packing and unpacking when you set camp each time.

Well, most of us will never have to pack all of our belongings on a camel. So camels aside, here is an even greater dilemma: All of the stuff, all of the things, what happens to them if we do die today? It is true, "We can't take them with us." We can have it all buried with us, I guess, but that would take a big gravesite and what is the point? Ancient Egyptian Rulers arranged for this to be done for them after they died in great pyramids and burial sites, so that they would have their things with them in the after-life. It didn't work.

In fact what it did was to cause all kinds of conflict between searchers and seekers, once some of what was discovered came to light. Deaths and wars can be attributed to humanity not being able to share possessions. So if we can't take it with us...it is left for someone to sort through, dispose of, and possibly fight over. Is this the intent we have for our families after we are gone?

From closets overflowing with unworn clothes to boxes brimming with crafts and knickknacks, experts estimate that nearly 6 million Americans have a hoarding problem that affects their quality of life. Here is another news story, listen to the children's response toward their parent's stuff.

From the outside, Sharyn and Marvin's 3,000-square-foot house looks like a typical American home. Step inside, however, and the foyer has become a narrow passage walled by stockpiles of possessions. The kitchen is drowning in bags and boxes filled with unused items. The family room is unrecognizable, with every piece of furniture covered in heaps of miscellaneous belongings.

Sharyn blames herself for the clutter. "I'm a shopaholic and I just buy and buy and buy." She describes her home as terrible, uncomfortable and suffocating. Breaking down into tears, Sharyn admits she needs help. "I don't know how I've done this to myself, to my husband, to my family. I don't want them to hate me. If I were to die tomorrow and they were left having to contend with all this stuff, I think they would end up hating me the rest of their lives. I want to be free of the clutter that's taking over my life."

Sharyn and Marvin's children, Jodi, Steve and Rich, say their parents' home wasn't always filled with clutter. "It gradually happened little by little," Jodi says. "I think as each one of us moved out, it got worse and worse. I was the last one out and after that, it just got really bad." At first, she says the hoarding was seen as a minor issue—only the basement and a back room were used for storage. Then, Sharyn filled the garage. "It went from a three car garage, going down to a two car, to a one car, to a no car," Jodi says. Over the next 10 years, Sharyn's hoarding filled the entire home. Not only does the clutter create chaotic conditions, but Steve is concerned for his parents' safety. "God forbid there would be a fire or something and they'd have to get out," he says.

Over the years, Rich says he and his family have stopped visiting the house. Now, for the first time in five years, Rich steps into his parents' home. "Holy shipwreck," he says as he enters the foyer. Having to turn sideways to squeeze through the mounds of clutter, Rich is stunned by the sheer

amount of possessions. "This stuff doesn't mean anything, I mean—it's meaningless,"

After touring the space that was still accessible in the home, Rich says he feels devastated. "I came in with energy. I came in thinking I could make a dent in this. I mean, you can't even make space. I'm wiped out. I haven't touched anything, I haven't lifted a thing—I'm wiped out. I'm physically and emotionally drained. It's overwhelming," he says.

Sharyn admits that shopping is her weakness. "When I shop and I find a good deal, it's total excitement that I got something special for my money," Sharyn also has a problem with collecting. "I don't have *one* of anything in my house. If I have one pair of sunglasses, I have 10. And if I was going to learn I needed a pair of sunglasses, sometimes I wouldn't even be able to find one." When asked what do you want from your home? Sharyn said "Peace. Harmony. Neatness. Tidiness. A place to call home. A comfort zone I'm happy to be in," Marvin said "A place that our family and friends can come visit—it's been a long time," So long, in fact, that Sharyn and Marvin estimate that they haven't had their friends over in 12 years.

Is this the inheritance we would give our children? You may be thinking: my stuff is not that bad..., one corner, a garage, (don't be mentally pointing that finger at someone else's stuff, remember these word are meant for you personally.... We all need to deal with our own stuff!) an attic, a special collection, my craft room...

Ok, I admit this whole subject has come before me as I confronted the room full of stuff in my house in Hayward that I fondly call 'my play room.' It was designed as a craft room, but I haven't had time, and I admit it, space, to use the room and the stuff within it since I began ministry, 20 years ago.

That was a month ago. Since then I have cleaned a pickup load of junk out, piling what remains in totes, to still be sorted. As I looked at each thing going out, I realized that my sons wouldn't have sorted, but thrown it all out. Now – or when I finish going through the totes, they will know what is and was really important to me.

Including newspaper clippings and pictures of them growing up; books that have meaning to me, some handed down from my grandparents and relatives; and most importantly my relationship with them. You may be thinking 'my stuff is not that bad.' Have you sorted your heart lately? What in there needs to be sorted, removed, cleaned out? And what needs to be preserved in your relationships?

Jesus only had one possession to give: His love, in relationship with others. Jesus was not about possessions, that is why he answered the man just so with a parable about greed. Jesus was all about the two brothers and their relationship. He handled the whole conversation with a finesse that spoke of the grace of God for all of us, without the judgment attached.

It's not just about the stuff we have physically piled up in our lives. It is even more about the stuff in our relationships that needs sorting out...Cleaning out offers more space and more time in our lives for what is most important; cleaning out allows us to hear what Jesus is saying about adding 'more God' and 'more of each other.' This is the best stuff to pile up, to keep and preserve for today and the future.

If you die today what stuff is left behind? Is it a gift or a curse to you? To your family? Jesus ends the parable with this line: *"So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."* This morning you will be offered Holy Communion. I invite you to take that opportunity to mentally give up some of your unneeded stuff, and commit your heart to receive more from Christ.

### **Holy Communion:**

**Invitation:** Christ our Lord invites to his table all who loved him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore let us confess our sin before God and one another.

**Confession and Pardon: Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! **In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.**

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

God is with you. **And Also with you.**

Open your hearts. **We open them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right and a joyful thing always to always and everywhere to give you thanks, gracious God. You Mighty One, have done great things for us., and holy is your name. Your mercy is for those who honor you from generation to generation. Throughout history you have helped your people in remembrance of your mercy, according to the promises you made to our ancestors. **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.**

Mary, pregnant with the child Jesus, proclaimed God's glory: God has shown strength with his arm, and scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.**

Look favorably on us , Mighty One, and through your child Jesus Christ redeem us. Fill us and this meal with your Holy Spirit, that we might dwell in your mercy and follow in your ways. Through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory are yours, Holy god, now and forever. **Amen.**

And now with the confidence of the children of God let us pray: **The Lords Prayer**