

YOUR TREASURE

Luke 12:22-40

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

August 7, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 12, verses 22 through 40. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 12, beginning at verse 22, we read in Jesus' name.

²² And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

³⁵ "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

What do you fear? What keeps you up at night? What makes you anxious? This is your god.

This gospel lesson is all about the First Commandment. The LORD says, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7). The Small Catechism explains this simply and brilliantly: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." That's what it means to

have a god. Whatever we fear above all things, that is our god. Whatever we love above all things, that is our god. Whatever we trust in above all things, that is our god.

Last week, we also focused on the First Commandment. We spent most of our time in the Old Testament lesson from Ecclesiastes, but the theme of the gospel lesson was the same. In it Jesus told a parable about a rich man who had such a great harvest that he had nowhere to store his crops. So he tore down his barns and built bigger ones. He was already a wealthy man, so he didn't really need this extra wealth. But he spent part of it, just so he could store the rest of it. Part of the tragedy was that he had no one to share it with. He was alone in his religion of self. We see this from the way he speaks. He says "I" six times and "my" five times. "I, I, I, I, I, I. My, my, my, my, my." And the only time he uses the word "you" is when he's talking to himself. He says, **"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry"** (12:19). He took security in his wealth. He trusted it like a god. He thought it would set him up for the rest of his life. And, in a way, I suppose it did, because his life ended that night. God said to him, **"Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"** (12:20). It was a question without an answer. He didn't even know. He had no one to leave it to. Everything he had spent his life working for was suddenly gone. Or, to be more accurate, his stuff was still there, but he was gone. So the greater tragedy is that his stuff could not save his soul from death. He loved wealth above all things. To love someone or something doesn't really mean that we just like it a whole lot. It means that we serve it. We sacrifice ourselves for it. To love money means that we serve it. We sacrifice ourselves in order to get it. And then, once we obtain it, we trust it. That's what the man in the parable did. He trusted it to give security and merriness to his soul. He loved and trusted wealth. That's two of the three actions that define what it means to have a god.

In the lesson for today, Jesus speaks more of love and trust, but he also speaks about the other action: fear.

It's a commentary on the parable of the rich fool. Jesus says, **"Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on"** (12:22). He tells us to consider the birds and the flowers. What do birds do all day? They fly around. They eat. They sleep. Once in a while they build a nest. They do very little work, but your Father feeds them. And after a little while, they die. And what do flowers do all day? Literally, nothing. They just grow and look pretty. Then they die. For birds, and flowers, and every other creature under heaven, your Father gives them what they need for this life, and then they die.

The same thing is true for you. Your Father gives you what you need for this life, and then you die. Humans, more than any other creature under heaven, live with the delusion that we are in control of our own lives. It's a lie. If your Father sustains the lives of all his pets, how much more does he care for his children?

Now, he gives us the ability to work, and he commands us to work. He even says through the apostle Paul, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). But this is all the gift of God. The ability to work, and even work itself, is the gift of God. Whatever your Father gives you to do, do it with all your might. But even the wages you receive for that work is the gift of God. Humans are the most foolish of all the creatures under heaven, because we have the delusion that we are in control of our own lives.

This is a lot of pressure to place on ourselves. So we become anxious about our lives. We fear not having enough to eat. We fear not having a place to live. We fear getting sick. We fear not having enough for retirement. We fear all sorts of things. These things threaten our lives, and

so we fear them. And it's true that there are many things that can destroy our lives. But there's no way to avoid it. No matter what you do, one of these things is going to get you. And yet, even this is in your Father's gracious hand. He gives you what you need for this life, and then you die. This too is from the hand of God. So do not fear, and do not be anxious. Rather, fear God.

The three actions of fear, love, and trust are all related. The chief of these three is trust. What we trust determines what we will also fear and love. Our hearts set themselves on something they find to be trustworthy. It could be something we already have, or it could be something we still lack, but which we desire. It could be something we think will protect us, or it could be something we think will give us happiness. And whatever that thing is, whatever our heart targets, that determines what we will also fear and love.

We fear what will happen to us if we lose that thing or if we fail to obtain it. For example, if you trust a large retirement fund, you might fear inflation. Or you might even fear living so long that your fund runs out. If you're still building that fund, you might fear a recession or losing your job. You fear these things, because you trust a large retirement fund.

It also makes you love certain things. And by "love," I don't mean those things you like a whole lot. That's not what love is. Love is about action. It's what you serve. So you work to build that fund. You sacrifice other things in life for it. It could be family, church, or giving to the needy. These things get in the way of our retirement fund, so we sacrifice them.

Whatever we fear, love, and trust in above all things, that is what we really worship as our god. The chief of these three is "trust." So whatever we fear and whatever we love reveals what our hearts really trust. Is it the one true God? Or is it something else? If it's something else, that something else cannot really save you. You will serve it, then it will fail you, and you will die. If it's the one true God, you will still die, but he will bring you through death and into his kingdom.

This is Jesus' great promise in this passage: **"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"** (12:32). We spend our lives trying to build our own little kingdoms, but it is your Father's good pleasure to give you his kingdom. The kingdom of God, with all its majesty, glory, and wealth, is yours through faith in Jesus Christ. And if that is ours in Jesus Christ, it changes the way we think of our own little kingdoms. They're just sandcastles. And that's suddenly okay. If the kingdom of God belongs to his little children, then our pathetic kingdoms can crumble like sand, and we've lost nothing.

Therefore, Jesus says, **"Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys"** (12:33). What does this mean? Does it mean that we can earn a treasure in heaven by giving to the needy? Certainly not. Our minds might go there. But Jesus doesn't make that link between the two things. He does not say that giving to the needy will earn us treasure in heaven. Our minds go there, because we're always thinking, *What's in it for me?* And we often think in terms of transactions. We pay money, and we get something in return. So Jesus commands us to give to the needy, and we think, *Why? What's in it for me? What will you give me if I do?* But that's the wrong way to think about it. Jesus has already promised us the kingdom. It is not your Father's good pleasure to make a deal with you. It is not your Father's good pleasure to test you, as though he will reward you if you pass the test. No. **"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."** Sometimes we suffer from the horrible thought that we have a reluctant God. We wrongly think that we have to work hard, or pray hard, or believe hard in order to convince God to be good to us. That is all wrong. God is not reluctant. It

YOUR TREASURE (Luke 12:24-40)

is his **“good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”** So we do not earn treasure in heaven by giving to the needy. We need to think about it in a different way. God gives us treasure in heaven as a pure gift, and this sets us free to give to the needy. Our treasure is no longer on earth, because our Father in heaven has promised us something far greater there. He has promised us the entire kingdom!

So Jesus commands us to give. If you don't have ability, you are not bound to give. And, actually, if you do not have enough, you should tell someone. You should tell me or one of the deacons, because other members of this congregation have offered to help, but they don't know who to help. In a congregation, it is right for members to help one another. When you state your need, you give others the opportunity to obey Jesus' command.

For those who have the ability, the command is this: **“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.”** When you see someone who actually needs something from you, kick over your sandcastle and give it to them, because you have a kingdom in heaven. That's your treasure. **“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (12:34).

This is Jesus' diagnostic tool for us to see what our God really is. Where is our treasure? What do we value above anything else? How do we spend our resources? How do we spend our money? How do we spend our time? People say, “Time is money.” For some people, that's true. For some people, money is more valuable than time. For others, time is more valuable than money. Or it could be something else. Whatever your most valuable resource is, how do you spend it? That's where your heart is. Is your heart in the wrong place? Should it be somewhere else? Then put your treasure somewhere else. When you spend your time or money on something, it draws your heart toward those things. So if your heart is in the wrong place, move your treasure, and your heart will follow.

Finally, consider Jesus and where his heart is. This is the most surprising part. In the last part of our reading, Jesus compares himself to a master who is returning from a wedding feast. And he gets back in the middle of the night. What happens then? The servants take care of the master, right? They wash his feet, they prepare a meal for him, and they have his bed ready for him. Right? But's that's not what Jesus says will happen with him. He says the master **“will dress himself for service and have [the servants] recline at table, and he will come and serve them”** (12:37). Jesus is the master, and he comes to serve his servants. He comes to serve you.

So where is Jesus heart? What is his treasure? It's you. He **“came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). You are his treasure. Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything that he has not already done a billion times greater. He gave up everything he had for our sake. His treasure is you, and he gave everything for you, including his very own life. We are the needy. We are the ones who are lost. We are chasing after false gods and losing everything when those false gods fail us. So the one true God seeks for us. And he gives his body and blood into death for us. He purchases us as his own, and he gives us his kingdom. You are the one he treasures, so he gives his treasure to you. This gives you freedom to give away your sandcastle, because his kingdom is yours forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.