

Luke 12:13-21

***13* Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." *14* Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" *15* Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*16* And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. *17* He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*18* "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. *19* 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."*20* "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' *21* "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."**

What does a good life consist of?

- 1. The fool thinks it consists in the abundance of possessions.***
- 2. The Christian knows it consists in being rich toward God.***

It was a busy weekend here at St. Matthew's. On Friday, a baby boy was born in the hospital at Willmar. On Saturday, a committal service was held in Renville and a wedding took place in Danube. These events mark several of the major events in a person's lifespan and it all happened in one weekend. That might be a common occurrence for a much bigger church, but for us it was a something special. And as we observed this special weekend - with all these major life events - one couldn't help but contemplate some of those big life questions. What is this life all about? What does a good life consist of?

Well, our readings for today make it very clear, that life is not all about money or just about having stuff. It is not just about being successful, and having plenty of toys and enjoying life to the full before you die. It is somewhat of an oversimplification, but for many this is essentially what life boils down to, and that is unfortunate. Money and success, prosperity and wealth, all too often drive and define people. This pursuit of more and more quickly dominates a person's life to the point where this becomes the chief purpose of life. The world around us calls this business as usual, admirable, even wise, but God calls this foolishness. He does so because this pursuit

also has the awful tendency to consume many people to the point that they ignore their spiritual needs.

This pursuit of more and more is called greed.

Greed is so very dangerously deceptive because it comes in all different shapes and sizes. A person watching the news lately could easily identify the sin of greed as being a major culprit behind high profile baseball players lying and cheating so that they could make hundreds of millions of dollars instead of a just a few million. That's greed at its most obvious and blatant. But greed has also mastered the art of being sneaky and subtle. Greed sneaks up on a mother as she looks into the eyes of her newborn son and wants to give him the world. I need him to have this and that so that we can be happy. I need to give my boy the best to find so that we may find security and peace, and he will grow up to be somebody. Greed sneaks in and we go much too far in this pursuit of wealth. Greed finds its way into a young man heart as he marries his high school sweetheart and he is driven to give her the best. No ordinary apartment, no ordinary house, no ordinary car will do, we need the best. I need to find more work and make more money and then we will be all set and our life will be great. Greed sneaks in and we go too far. Greed sneaks into the hearts of grown men and women when they fight with their siblings over who gets the land, who gets the house, and who gets the inheritance when mom or dad dies. We have all fallen into this deceptive trap.

Greed is relentless. It wants to take hold of our hearts in wants to alter our priorities and dominate our thinking. Greed seeks to set this pursuit of wealth and money, possessions and status, as the chief purpose in our life. It pushes its way to such a high status because greed claims that we will find the good life and happiness and fulfillment and security when we get enough stuff and when we accumulate enough wealth.

Our text for today contains one of Christ's strongest warnings against covetousness and greed. He does not want us to be fools chasing after that which is fleeting. But rather he desires that we have something that has real and lasting value. He desires that our priorities would be in order and our chief concern is that we would be rich toward God. He wants us to find happiness and peace and security not in things of this world that are here today and gone tomorrow, but Christ Jesus wants us to find the good life in him. He wants us to find happiness and peace and security in the eternal blessings that he gives.

As Jesus was teaching his disciples a crowd of thousands pressed in around Jesus, Luke tells us that they were so obsessed with seeing Jesus that they trampled upon each other. But as they closed in on him they were privileged to hear him speak on some very important spiritual matters. He spoke to his disciples in the beginning of this chapter about watching out for hypocrisy and boldly confessing his name. He warned them that they would face enemies who would threaten and oppose them and their message. But Jesus also warned them that their real enemy is the one who

can destroy both soul and body in hell. He tells them to keep watch, but he assures them that God will be there for them. He tells his disciples that they are precious to God, they have value. He is watching over them and protecting them from harm. ⁷ **Indeed**, Jesus said to them, ***the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid***; God will be with them. He will strengthen them. He will forgive their sins, he will save them from eternal death, and they in turn would praise him and proclaim his name.

As Jesus is teaching these important truths to his disciples he is speaking loud enough that all can hear. And so what do you suppose happens next. Did someone plead, "Lord forgive my sins and strengthen my faith." Did the crowd continue to press in as they were as they wanted to receive more spiritual instruction? No, instead, a man from the crowd yelled. ***Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.***

I think it is safe to say that Jesus was rather disgusted by this man's comment. Jesus has every reason to put this man squarely in his place, and he does. He uses a sharp address of rebuke to get the man's immediate attention. ***Man,*** Jesus said to him, ***who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?*** There were people appointed to take care of such matters. Jesus had come not to settle financial disputes, he had not come to ensure people received material wealth, but he had come to make people rich toward God. He was teaching this man and all the others about important spiritual matters and this man just wanted to make sure that he got his inheritance by any means.

Jesus, obviously, did not settle this man's dispute. But he did use this as a teaching opportunity. And so he warned the man and all the people there to ***Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*** He wanted this truth to resonate and stick with these people so he told an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. He told this parable of the rich fool.

This particular man was a farmer who *had a good year so he thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*¹⁸ ***Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.*** The plan wasn't really that bad of a plan. If he had a good crop it would be wise to build a bigger barn. The problem, however, was this man's motivation. The Lord Jesus continued his parable by speaking as the ¹⁹ ***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.'*** He thought the good life consisted of having more and more wealth. He was looking for peace and security in material wealth when he should have found such treasures in his relationship with God. God made that crystal clear when he reminded the man of how quickly all our worldly possessions could be taken away, or how quickly this life on earth could simply just end. ²⁰ ***But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get***

what you have prepared for yourself?’²¹ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

Life is not just about getting a bunch of things. It is not just about being rich and successful. It’s about learning about God and knowing what he has done for you. It’s about having the peace and the joy that comes through faith in Jesus. It’s about having and sharing the confidence that we are God’s dearly loved children and we have purpose and value because we are loved by him. That’s what the good life is all about. It is about being rich toward God and being generous with that spiritual wealth. Life is about having and sharing that message of peace and joy with your friends, and neighbors, your children and grandchildren.

God is gracious and merciful that he provides for our daily needs. Money, wealth, prosperity, are all gifts from his hand that he chooses to give as he sees fit. He wants us to have what we need. He wants us to use these gifts responsibly. But he does not want such things to cast a shadow on what truly matters. He doesn’t want us to try to find the purpose of life or happiness in such earthly ways. He has something better for us.

In the grand scheme of things your possessions don’t define you. They could all be taken away so quickly and who knows when our life will end and we won’t be able to take any of it with us. And so as children of God we know that our treasure is stored up for us in heaven. The fact that Christ Jesus has purchased us with his own precious blood - that defines us. We are his prized possessions. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, gave up his heavenly throne for a time, became a poor humble human being so that we might be his own. He won for us forgiveness and new life and heaven and offers them to us through word and sacrament so that we poor sinners are now spiritually rich. What incredible blessings the Lord God has bestowed upon us!

And so as the proud new mother looks at her new son she considers not only what this child will need for his body, but she considers the great honor it will be to share the good news of Jesus with this child. As that happy groom looks his bride in the eyes he considers how richly he has been blessed spiritually and quietly considers the responsibility of being the head of the family and making time in God’s word a main priority. And as that Christian man or woman takes his last dying breath, he or she can fall asleep in peace, knowing that eternal peace and stability are found in Christ and that heaven is the eternal inheritance given to God’s children. From life to death may God keep from the trappings of greed and so that we may see how the Lord has blessed us with the good life through faith in Christ Jesus.

That, my friends, is what the good life consists of. Knowing the Lord Jesus, being made rich before God through faith in Jesus Christ, and then receiving your reward in heaven that will never be taken away. May this good news of Jesus bring you happiness and peace, stability and joy all your years. Amen.