

Sermon ✝ July 31, 2022
Hebrews 10:11-25 & Luke 12:13-21
Frank Maxwell

He was walking the wharf in Biloxi, Mississippi, when he saw her. One moment she was standing there and the next she was in the air and falling into the water. Without a moment's hesitation, he jumped in after her—to save her from taking her own life. The only problem was that, in his blind attempt to save her life, he forgot that he did not know how to swim.

The twenty-four-year-old young woman who had jumped to kill herself—she later would say because she was just "tired of living"—saw the man come up, thrash about and, gasping for air, cry for help.

That's when the miracle happened. Suddenly that young woman received something which she had not had before—*purpose*. She swam to him, grabbed hold of him and pulled him safely to shore. Instead of ending her own life, she had saved the life of another.

Today we gather before the God who alone is God: giver of good things. As the psalmist writes, "*I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.'*"

In this morning's parable of the Rich Fool, we are reminded that there are no guarantees in this earthly life. Sure, we want to have enough to be comfortable, but what good is all of our stuff if we're dead? And what is the value in simply compiling riches if we are not *about something*.

This morning we consider our final *Faith Habit: Serving at St. Luke's & Beyond*.

Jesus tells us that we are gifted by God . . . and that we are gifted for purpose. Each one of us has received gifts from God. Those gifts include talents, natural abilities. They include skills . . . those gifts which we develop over time and experience.

But God has also given us gifts of passions and interests. These are the internal maps which would plot our course through life in keeping with God's will.

And, lastly, God's good gifts include spiritual gifts. These are those particular gifts which the Holy Spirit bequeaths to Christians in order to bless the world in extraordinary ways through God's people.

What is essential is that we grasp the two truths of our Lord's parable: the first is that we *are gifted*; the second is that we are expected to use our gifts. Not just store them away

The giver of all good gifts calls us to share those gifts . . . not just for the world's sake, but that our joy might be complete.

Pastor Scott Webster tells of sitting around tables in the church fellowship hall at a potluck dinner. At his table, they were having a wonderful time sharing stories and memories with each other. As the discussion leader, Scott asked the next question for the group, "*What is one of the most meaningful gifts you have*

ever received?" Several people shared about birthday presents, anniversary gifts or a favorite Christmas present.

Then, quietly, Joe Pearce spoke up. Joe was eighty-four years old and the International Racquetball Champion in the eighty to eighty-four-year-old bracket. After a momentary pause, Joe said, *"Several months ago I received a phone call. It was from some of the boys I coached on a high school basketball team in 1961. Now in their seventies, they were having a reunion. They called to tell me how much I had meant to them and that I had helped shape their lives."*

Joe paused his voice choked up and, shaking his head, he mumbled, *"That Just might be the nicest gift I ever received."*

The point: don't block the gifts! You have been created to make a difference! You are not an accident of nature. There is a life-giving purpose planted within you which is just waiting to burst forth in the daily-ness of your life.

The living of that purpose may not be dramatic, but it will have an impact because it carries the very power of the Creator with it. That is what Joe Pearce found out with that phone call.

Trust the gifts within you—they are God's internal guides to lead us into lives of purpose and power. Hear the giver.

You don't need to jump off a wharf in Biloxi, Mississippi to discover your purpose. And isn't it interesting that when the young woman's life became imbued with purpose, it didn't come through a "near death experience" but through the voice of God in the drowning man next to her? Isn't it fascinating that Joe Pearce heard the voice of God affirming his life not through a great event but through the voices of those he had coached years before?

Jesus has said, *"Give and you shall receive."* It is called the mirror effect—what you give to the world will come back to you. If you give of your gifts, gifts will return to you. If you withhold those gifts, if you block that eternal purpose within you by the hand of our Creator God, then life will block you. No wonder the psalmist writes, *"The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage."*

When was the last time you felt the passions of your inner gifts set loose in service that made a difference—mostly to you? The author of the Book of Hebrews tells us to encourage one another when he writes, *"And let us consider how to **provoke** one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another . . ."*

Let this be our eternal recognition when our Creator God meets us on the other side of that bridge that spans this world and eternity. That God might say to you and to me,

*"Well done, good and faithful servant, Well lived, child of God,
Well shared, daughter or son of the Creator, Well done . . ."*

Amen.