

The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Sermon - August 3 2025

It's not about the money. Not in this parable or in life.

Let's start with the parable. Jesus doesn't warn against money, wealth, or material abundance. He warns against greed, about the insatiable feeling of never having enough. And the parable he tells illustrates this. The farmer's problem isn't that he's had a great harvest, or that he's rich, or that he wants to plan for the future. The farmer's problem is that his good fortune has curved his vision so that everything he sees starts and ends with himself.

Listen again to the conversation he has with, not a spouse or friend or parent or neighbor, but only with himself: "*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.'*"

Do you see what I mean? It is an absolutely egocentric conversation, even including a conversation with himself inside the conversation he is already having with himself! This is why he is a fool. He has fallen prey to the notion that life, and particularly the good life, consists of possessions, precisely the thing Jesus warns against.

What, then, does the good life consist of? Read the rest of what Jesus says across the gospels and it becomes pretty clear: relationships — relationships with each other and with God. And, as you inevitably discover while reading, these two can't really be separated. Hence Jesus tells stories like the parable of the Good Samaritan that invite us to think more broadly about who we imagine being our neighbor, and he preaches sermons that extol caring for the poor, loving our enemies, and doing good for those in need. Not once does Jesus lift up setting up a retirement account or securing a higher-paying job as part of seeking the kingdom of God.

Which doesn't mean these things are bad. Really. Money can do lots of wonderful things — it can provide for you and your family, it can be given to others in need, it can be used to create jobs and promote the general welfare, and it can make possible a more comfortable life. It just can't produce the kind of full and abundant life that each of us seeks and that Jesus promises. So it's not about the money, it's about our attitude towards the money and those around us.

Now let's turn to our life. Truth be told, I think most of know and believe that what Jesus says is true. We know that money can't buy happiness. The thing is, even though we know this, most of us struggle to live this way. That is, most of us are seduced by the same message that captures the soul of the farmer in Jesus' parable.

Which isn't really all that surprising. I mean, watch TV or browse the Internet for any significant amount of time, and you'll be not just exposed but actually inundated with the message the farmer has bought into. The majority of advertisements on all forms of media are designed to exploit our inborn sense of insecurity. This kind of inadequacy marketing engages in a deadly two-step waltz. First it identifies and exaggerates something we are insecure about — our breath, our body, our status, etc. — then it offers us something to buy — mouthwash, a weight loss program, a bigger car, etc. — that will remedy our concern and make us acceptable again. (Not convinced? Watch a few commercials and see if you can identify the two-steps danced remorselessly across channels.)

Little wonder, then, that we have fallen prey to this message. Moreover, materialism — or consumer-consumptionism or affluenza or whatever else you might want to call it — has one distinct advantage over the abundant life Jesus extols: it is immediately tangible. Relationships, community, purpose — the kinds of things that Jesus invites us to embrace and strive for — are much harder to lay our hands on. We know what a good relationship feels like, but it's hard to point to or produce on a moment's notice. And we know that wonderful feeling of being accepted into a community, but it's not like you can run out to Walmart and buy it. And so we substitute material goods for immaterial ones because, well, they're right there in front of us and we've got a whole culture telling us that this is the best there is. What, then, shall we do?

We don't often talk about money in church — in fact, we're actively discouraged from doing so — but we need to. Money is too important to ignore and if we remain silent then the cultural voices about money are the only ones we will hear. Keep in mind, money isn't the problem; our culturally informed beliefs about what constitutes the good life is. St. Augustine once said that God gave us people to love and things to use, and sin, in short, is the confusion of these two things. So let's start talking about the use and abuse of material wealth and wonder together how our faith community and tradition can help us live into the kind of abundant life that material wealth can support but cannot produce.

We need to *practice naming blessings*. The elements of abundant life that Jesus describes throughout the gospels — things like relationship, community, love, purpose — may be less tangible but they are also more powerful than material goods. And each of us experiences them everyday. The joy of a good conversation, the sense of purpose that comes from helping another, the warmth of a loving relationship, the feeling of community from gathering with friends or family, the awareness of how many ways we are blessed each and every day — these things are palpably and powerfully available to us, but an entire media universe pushes us to tune into what is negative or missing rather than what is positive and right in front of us. I invite you to begin a daily practice of noticing, naming, and giving thanks for blessing. That might take shape in a daily moment of silent prayer of gratitude, or in writing a brief email or note to give thanks for something or someone, or keeping a log of blessing, or whatever. But start. Our practices shape our beliefs and attitudes, and this kind of practice will have almost immediate positive outcomes.

God wants for us life and love and mercy and community. And God will not stop sharing this message. Indeed, the same Jesus who warns against greed and invites abundant life and tells us of God's love in the passages we've been reading this summer carries this message all the way to the cross so that we can see just how much God loves us.