

Joshua Willadsen
10th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermons
August 1, 2010

LUKE 12:13-21 "LIFE IS A GIFT, SO GIVE"

Life is a gift, so give. Life is not in the accumulation of things. Life is not in possessing more and more and more. Life is the gift of the living God who has created, redeemed, and sanctified you. Your life is not your own to will and do as you please. Your life, all life is a gift of God. God created us and all things through His Word. God has breathed the breath of life into us; we are His creation. God has redeemed you through His Son Jesus Christ; through the blood of the Lamb, He purchased and won you from sin, death, and the devil. God has given you new life in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel. Life is a gift, so give.

Yet why is it that we do not give? Why do we hold back? Why do we gather and collect more and more things for ourselves and give so little God? Are you afraid that by giving generously to the Lord you will end up in poverty or is it really that if you give of your first-fruits you don't think you will have enough to buy and gather all the things you want?

Why do our eyes wander and focus upon things we do not have, but seem pleasing? Why do we covet and seek to gain still more and more while forgetting about the good gifts we have been given? Why do you spend so much money on homes, cars, clothing, entertainment, and vacations, but give so little to God in thanksgiving for His Word which is preached in your midst?

Truly we are like our first parents, Adam and Eve. God had given them life and all good things; they lacked nothing. God gave them dominion over all the earth to order, direct, and tend it in accordance with God's good will. And together Adam and Eve applied their gifts in thankful service to all that God had entrusted to their care. But the serpent spoke a crafty lie that Eve and Adam believed:

- God has not given you all you need. He is holding out on you. You need more.*
- If you eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will not die, but you will become like God; you will know good and evil.*

Eve saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye; she coveted it; she took and ate it. Then she gave it to Adam and he took and ate it. Adam and Eve denied the truth of God's Word, that their life, that all life, was the gift of God. Instead they believed the lie of the serpent, the lie that to this day we all believe, "You need more..."

This lie abides and thrives today in America. This lie has become the heart and center of the advertising industry. "You need more... of this or that" for your life to be complete, for happiness and joy, for success, and even for salvation. Adds for shoes, cars, vacations, computers, video games, diet pills, food, drink, and on and on all tell the

same lie that countless people believe; “You need more. Your life is not complete, your life is not life, unless you have this...” Americans have become slaves to debt because they believe this lie; we spend money we don’t have in order to possess more empty promises. Even those Americans not in debt have become slaves by becoming possessed by the very things they seek to possess; so much time, attention, energy, and money are invested in things for ourselves that we are left with nothing to give to others, who need them.

Disciples of Christ Jesus, you who have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; listen to the teaching of your Lord and Master. The Lord Jesus would have you know and believe the truth and deny the lie! Life is a gift. Life is not the abundance of things. 15 And He said to them, “Look out and guard yourselves from all covetousness, because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.”

Jesus spoke this teaching to His first disciples and the crowd that had gathered around Him as He was heading for Jerusalem. Someone from the crowd wanted Jesus to side with him in an inheritance dispute. 13 And one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, speak to my brother that he divide with me the inheritance.” 14 But He said to him, “Man, who appointed me judge and arbitrator between me and you?” Jesus refused to get involved in what was a fight for wealth between brothers. Instead Jesus used the occasion to warn against covetousness and teach that life is not found in things, but is God’s gift.

15 And He said to them, “Look out and guard yourselves from all covetousness, because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.” 16 And He spoke to them a parable saying, “The land of some rich man produced good crops. 17 And he thought to himself saying, ‘What shall I do, for I do not have anywhere to gather my fruit?’ 18 And he said, ‘This I shall do, I shall tear down my barns and I shall build greater ones and I shall gather there all the wheat and all my good things 19 and I will say in my soul; soul, you have many good things laid up for many years; rest, eat, drink, and be merry.’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool, this night your soul is required of you; and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?’ 21 In this way is the one who treasures up for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Jesus’ story of the rich fool is intended as a loving warning to you and me. We are warned not to be like the rich fool who died alone, whose god was the things he had gathered for himself. Instead Jesus calls us to be rich to God with all that we have, because all that we have, our lives, are a gift from God. In thanksgiving for God’s rich gifts, Jesus calls us to use our gifts in the service of other people and not only for ourselves.

God gave the rich man his wealth. God is the one who blessed him with a fruitful land and crop. God gave the man more than he needed, so that those in need might be provided for from his abundance. But the man foolishly did not understand that his life and all he had was a gift of God to be used in the service of others.

The man did not consult God or even another human being when he pondered, “What shall I do, for I do not have anywhere to gather my fruit?” ; he speaks only with himself. The man does not see his abundance as an opportunity to serve, but as a problem he must solve so that he can enjoy it all. And then it comes to him. I will just

tare down my barns that are too small and build bigger and better ones that can hold all my good stuff. I am set for life; I can retire, eat, drink, and be merry all by myself.

Truly the rich man believed the lie that we do, “You need more...” He spent his time, energy, and resources gathering his riches and good things to himself. And in the end the rich man died with nothing at all. He died alone. He died with no heirs to pass on his wealth to; he died having served no one else; he even died apart from God, for wealth and himself had become his own god.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord Jesus is warning us; He is warning you! Do not believe the lie of the serpent; do not be like the rich fool; do not deny the Giver of Life by failing to be rich toward Him. Life is a gift, so give. Give richly and generously from your first-fruits, for all you have is from God. Give, not because God needs your gifts (for He neither needs them nor you; His Word accomplishes what He wants), but give because your neighbor does need them, because your brothers and sisters in Christ need them.

Now to be clear, Jesus is not telling us to renounce all worldly wealth; He is not telling us to take vows of poverty, to sell all our possessions, and give them to the poor or to the church. Jesus is not even demanding that His disciples give a mere 10% of their income. Jesus is teaching us His disciples to give generously to God from our first-fruits, from all that God has first given to us. Life is a gift, so give.

People of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, in case you did not know our congregation is in need. We do not have an abundance of money, in fact we are greatly lacking. We do not have a lot of members. The generosity of others outside our congregation has chiefly enabled us to fulfill our congregational duties to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, to provide for the living of the pastor, to maintain church property, and to serve the community of Oakland, TN. That is not to say that our own members have not been generous in giving their time, talents, and treasure, but it is to say that our congregation is in need of your generosity financially as well as the service of your time and talents. From our humble beginnings until the present our congregation is still in need.

God has given you life and given you all that you have. God has called you into the body of Christ by the working of the Spirit and gathered you to this congregation to give and serve as He has enabled you. When you don't gather on Sunday because you are sleeping in or busy doing unnecessary activities; when you don't give generously from your first-fruits, because you are saving or spending that money on yourself; and when you don't give your time and energy in service to others, but fill your time only with personal pleasures, then God does not suffer, but your brothers and sisters in Christ suffer and.

Life is a gift, so give. Do not be a fool like the rich man who dies alone. Take to heart the instruction of our Lord Jesus, “Look out and guard yourselves from all covetousness, because one's life is

not in the abundance of his possessions.” Stop believing the lie that “You need more...” Trust instead in Jesus, the Christ the Son of God!

St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.”* And also 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, & 17, *“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died, and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.”*

Christ Jesus gave all of Himself for you! Christ gave all His body and all His blood to redeem you from sin, from idolatry, from all covetousness. Christ gave all of Himself to the poverty of the cross so that you might receive the rich abundance of God’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Christ died and was raised and you have been baptized into His death and resurrection so that the old covetous sinner might die and a new creation might be raised. You are a new creation in Christ free to give generously to God in loving service to your neighbor. Christ Jesus is your life, your new life! In Christ the lie of the serpent has been overcome. In Christ sin, idolatry, and covetousness have been forgiven. In Christ, you are richly blessed in every way, both in this world and in the new heavens and the new earth to come. Life is a gift, so give, Amen!