

Rich Toward God
Luke 12:13-21
Rev. Valerie Fairchild

Let us pray
Lord, open our hearts and our ears to your word for us today. We don't want to leave unchanged. Amen.

Do you know a hoarder? A person who accumulates lots of stuff? I had a family member who was one. I believe it started as a child of the depression. Nothing was to be wasted. Everything might be useful in the future. In addition, as a single mom, she had gone without necessities many times. I believe when she finally had a steady income, making purchases and accumulating stuff felt comforting.

Sadly, her hoarding led her to fill her three-bedroom home and garage and two metal storage units in the backyard. The hallway in her home was lined with stacked boxes, as was the dining room. Some hoarders, including her, even collect animals and at one point she had 19 cats. And these were not well-behaved cats, if you catch my drift.

One Christmas, everyone in the family received very unique birdhouses. Later in her storage, we found about twenty more birdhouses. She had large boxes filled with skeins of every color yarn. After all, if you start a project, you don't want to run out of a

particular dye lot. You might not be able to match it exactly.

People living with a hoarding disorder compulsively collect objects and animals to the extent that it impacts their relationships, health, and overall well-being. Researchers believe compulsive hoarding affects 1 in every 50 people and some say it is as high as 1 in every 20 people. If left untreated, this disorder has adverse effects on nearly every aspect of a person's life. (therecoveryvillage.com)

If this sounds like you, I encourage you to speak to me. Get help. It will benefit you and all your family. Also, there are organizations that help people get into start up homes like the Dream Center that rescues people from human trafficking and UMOM which helps homeless families. These organizations give people training and help them find jobs and then a home. All of these, and many others, welcome donations to prepare a home; all the cooking, eating, and food prep items, furniture, blankets, towels, clothing, computers, TV's, etc. You can pare down your stuff knowing you are helping someone else establish a home. Don't leave it for loved ones to deal with.

A friend once encouraged my relative to begin getting rid of her accumulated stuff to which she replied, "My children can take care of it when I'm gone." Unfortunately, much of what was stored in the units outside had water damage and mildew and most

of what was inside was covered with cat spray or worse. Even things that might have one time been treasured, were now worthless. And things like birdhouses and food processors and wooden bowls, that at one time could have been given away during gift collections at Christmas, were now thrown away.

Middle class America is said to be accumulating more possessions than ever. One of the faster growing segments of the gross national product today is the storage business. According to market research, Americans will pay \$37.5 billion this year on storage at an average cost of about \$90 a month. The most common rented unit measures 10 feet by 10 feet which when packed carefully holds two to four rooms' worth of furniture. (Jan. 3, 2018)

Imagine the good that could be accomplished in our world with \$37.5 billion dollars.

When John and I left our Flagstaff home of 24 years, the home we raised our children in, we found there was much we really could give away or trash. We moved from that home to a small one-bedroom apartment when my husband began to serve his first church and I was attending seminary. Obviously, we had to pare down the accumulation. Personally, it is a good activity for each of us. We learn to better prioritize what is really important.

In today's scripture reading, **“Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”** (Luke 12:13). Jesus

chose not to pass up a ‘teachable moment.’ He chose the role of teacher over that of arbiter. In his day, the laws concerning inheritance were found in scripture, in Numbers 27 and in Deuteronomy 21. Jesus recognized a greater need than that of dealing with an estate matter and he addressed the gathered crowd.

“He said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’” (Luke 12:15) Jesus then told the parable of a rich man who had an abundant harvest and the problem of not having enough storage space for his crop.

Is there a problem with abundance? Not in itself. God blesses us with successes and plenty. But God also knows our hearts. Listen to this rich man and you'll know his heart as well. **“He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.””** (v 17-19)

Do you hear it? In just these verses the man says, “I, I, my, I’ll, I, my, I, my, I’ll, myself. Now, this man didn’t do anything wrong. He didn’t cheat anyone. He carefully planted and the soil, rain, and sun, in other words blessings from God, rewarded him with a great harvest. Jesus had begun the parable with

the words, **“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.”** (v 16)

This man made an assumption that is all too easy for us to make. He assumed his abundance was all his own doing, or perhaps, if he thought it about it at all, he chalked it up to something people call ‘luck’. He’d forgotten about the workings of God.

This is challenge for us too. When do we, like the rich man, tend to take credit for all our accomplishments and accumulations? When did you last thank God for the blessings in your life? Not just the family and friends, but your home, your vacation, your job, your car, your stocked cupboards and refrigerator, your full closets?

One of the blessings of participating in ministries like the water walk, Kids Cafe and Operation Christmas Child, is that we are reminded just how blessed we are and how great the needs of the world are. Oh, don’t make the mistake of assuming that somehow you and I are *more worthy* of God’s blessings and somehow ‘those people’ are not worthy or God would have already taken care of them. God has provided enough resources for all; however, they aren’t equally distributed around the world. We are called to love our neighbor, far and near, and work with God to share his blessings.

Sadly, the rich man in the parable had forgotten something else besides God and caring for others. He’d also forgotten about the inevitable certainty of

death. **“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?’”** (v 20)

The fool lives for himself, talks to himself, plans for himself and congratulates himself. This man had forgotten that God created him with a greater purpose and that he could not take his riches with him when confronted with mortality. He missed the opportunity to be generous with the gifts and blessings he had received.

When John and I moved here to Vistancia, it was with the knowledge that our home would also serve as the church office and meeting space. We looked for large open spaces for leading small groups and for hosting potlucks. One room needed to serve as church office and storage for those things which can’t be kept in the heat of the church container.

I was both embarrassed by the size of our new home for just two people and pleased at having so much space. As we put our kitchen belongings in the cupboards, many remained empty. I remember saying to John that we needed to be careful not to accumulate more stuff and fill those cupboards. We already had to buy more furniture just to furnish the rooms. Now, nine years later, I admit, there are no empty kitchen cupboards. When the time comes to look for a retirement home, it will not be as large. What will we do with the extra stuff?

I've spoken with people who tell me they have lived in their new home three years and haven't yet emptied all their moving boxes. It makes you wonder if they even need what's in those boxes. We tend to unpack what we need first. Will they unpack and then store the items?

The gospel of Luke is full of lessons concerning abundance. John the Baptist proclaimed, "**The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.**" (Luke 3:11) Jesus cautioned, "**How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.**" (Luke 18:25)

Then there is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a beggar covered in sores who laid at the gate the rich man passed through every day. And the rich man ignored Lazarus' need each day. When both died, Lazarus was carried by angels to the side of Abraham, but the rich man was sent to Hades. The rich man called out to Abraham for mercy, "**But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'**" (Luke 16:19-31)

The problem is not wealth. And remember, we in our first world country are in the top ten percent of

income in the world. Many people of comfortable means are very godly people. The problem is when we forget about God and our call to love others as ourselves. The problem is when our stuff becomes all about 'I' and 'me.'

The rich man didn't need to build a larger barn. A bigger barn deprives others of God's resources. But before we get too uppity about the rich man, the truth is I didn't need to fill all my kitchen cupboards or my large closet. Our full cupboards, garages, and storage units deprive others of God's resources.

Let's ponder these questions:

1. Do we remember to thank God and give him praise for our homes, cars, jobs, clothing, food?
2. Do we tithe to God from the first fruits of our blessings: our home, income, spiritual gifts?
3. Do we remember God and others or are we filled with thoughts of 'I' and 'me'?

Let's be rich toward God and less focused on self. And let our richness enrich the lives of others.

Let us pray

Lord, you bless us so abundantly and you call us to use it to bless others. Forgive us when we keep it for ourselves. We realize that when we store our blessings, we deprive others of God's resources. Help us be generous, Lord. Thank you. Amen.