

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: July 18 – 31, 2016

Lectionary Readings: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–23, Psalm 49:1–12, Colossians 3:1–11, Luke 12:13–21,

Prayer of the Day: *Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

This week's references come from the following sources. The appropriate resource will be referenced at the end of an entry by using the letters preceding each resource listed here.

- BB: Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*.
- BPS: Brian P. Stoffregen's commentary notes (Pr, Faith Luth, Yuma AZ) Crossmarks.com/brian
- DL: David Lose, Luther Seminary, *In the Meantime*, www.davidlose.net
- DT: David L. Tiede, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*
- JG: Joel Green, *The New International Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*
- JS: John Shea, *The Relentless Widow (Luke)*
- L: Lectionary.com
- LTJ: Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*.
- NISB: *New Interpreter's Study Bible*
- SB: *Serendipity Bible for Groups* (NIV version)
- SPMc: Stephen P. McCutchan, *Water from the Rock, Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*
- WP: WorkingPreacher.org (Luther Seminary)
 - Elisabeth Johnson, Pastor, Lutheran Institute of Theology, Melganga, Cameroon
 - David Lose (2013), *Dear Working Preacher*, now President, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.
 - Meda Stamper (2016), Leicestershire, England

Background information on this text:

- “The parable of the rich fool (or ‘barn guy,’ as I always think of him) at the heart of this week's text illustrates simply and memorably the futility of choices made in isolation from the love of God and neighbor.

It reflects a central theme in Luke and in Jesus' preaching, the problem of wealth in the context of the holy kingdom where closeness to God is life and attachment to things reflects soul-stifling anxiety and fear.

The parable emerges from Jesus' response to a request from someone in the immense crowd of Luke 12:1 that Jesus arbitrates between him and his brother in the matter of an inheritance.” (Stamper, WP)
- “The parable [of the rich farmer] initiates a theme that becomes very prominent in the gospel from now on: nothing is more destructive of life and humanity than preoccupation with acquiring, holding on to, and increasing wealth. The problem is not so much the possession of riches as such. It is that the desire to acquire and enhance them, fed by insecurity, prevents people from attending to the relationship with God that brings the only security that counts.” (BB, 201)
 - “It is out of deep fear that the acquisitive instinct grows monstrous. Life seems so frail and contingent that many possessions are required to secure it, even though the possessions are frailer still than the life.” (LTJ, p. 201)
- “THE CONTEXT: This text, as well as the Gospels for the two following Sundays, comes in a section of Luke (12:1-13:9) where exhortations and warnings are given by Jesus in preparation for the coming judgment. The verses immediately preceding our text (vv. 1-12) and following

(vv. 22-31) are not included in the Revised Common Lectionary. One should take a look at them to better understand our text.

Culpepper (*Luke*, New Interpreter's Bible) writes of the transition from vv. 1-12 to vv. 13-21 with: 'Continuing the theme of this larger section, the next verses shift from confession of Jesus to forsaking the security of material possessions. Those who confess Jesus look to God for their security, not to their own ability to accumulate possessions and lay up wealth for the future.' [p. 255]

Our text is connected with the verses that follow by the sense of possessions (desiring more than what is needed) and by the word *psyche* (v. 19 twice, v. 20, v. 22, v. 23). This word is translated 'soul' or 'life' in these verses. I frequently use the word 'self' for *psyche*. *Psyche* is that mysterious thing that makes me me or you you. It is everything that makes a pile of organic materials come to life as an individual -- life force, soul, spirit, breath, personality, etc. As I said, I frequently combine all this into the word 'self.'

Related to this, our text is an illustration of what Jesus had said at the beginning of this entire section: 'Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops' (12:2-3). Most of our parable is 'hearing' the inner thoughts of the rich man -- what is in his *psyche* -- what is his true 'self.'" (BPS)

- "Toward the close of the previous section, Luke had registered a heightened sense of crisis, first by reporting Jesus' prediction, itself a representation of God's wisdom, regarding the hostile treatment expected of God's messengers. Following this, and closing out Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees and scribes, Luke observes that these religious leaders had adopted a new policy concerning Jesus. No longer would they simply scrutinize his practices in light of the law; from now on they would actively stalk him. Given the note on which the previous section ended, it is not surprising to find Jesus instructing his disciples on behavior appropriate to times of persecution in 12:1-12. What is more, in the midst of this teaching, Jesus raises the connection between present-day persecution and the eschatological crisis (12:5); with this, the stage is set for the dialogue-and-discourse sequence to follow.

... Throughout this narrative segment... Luke remains concerned (as he had been most explicitly in 11:1-13, and earlier in 6:17-49) with the resocialization of those who have joined (or who would join) the band of Jesus' followers. This reorientation of life, to which he sometimes refers as 'repentance,' involves a 'theological transformation'—that is, a change in one's understanding of the nature of God and of God's eschatological purpose. This theological reformation has a relationship of mutual dependence with a further transformation, this one is the arena of social practices—especially vis-à-vis persecution, possessions, and issues of social relations and status." (JG, 477)

- "Between assurances to the disciples against anxious concern (vv. 11-12, 22-30), Luke interposes another section of warnings. In vv. 1-12, Jesus was contrasting the folly of fearing persecutors with the wisdom of fearing God and assuring his followers of God's abiding concern for them. Now the question is not whom to fear, but whom or what to trust. Where is the source of true security and treasure? Once again, the warnings come first.

The discourse has apparently been assembled by Luke out of diverse traditional sources of the sayings of Jesus. Verses 13-15 were probably an independent memory piece, a typical question-and-answer dialog with the teacher which ends in two pronouncements. One is a word of direct address, 'Beware of greed!' and the other is a proverbial saying which explicates the warning, 'Life does not consist in the surplus of possessions!' The story of the 'rich fool' which follows is then used by Luke as an object lesson which directly illustrates the proverb. This is a 'parable' in the general sense of a morality story, but it also begins to transform the world of moral advice...

The moral instruction is not especially original with Jesus. Its force is even enhanced by the recognition that the wisdom traditions and psalms of Israel constantly warned against the

false security of wealth. The Greek and Latin moralists did the same...Jesus' teachings were fully in accord with the scriptural conviction that wealth could delude people into false confidence..." (DT, 232)

- "Although the anonymous question put to Jesus in v. 13 seems unrelated to Jesus' foregoing instruction, Jesus begins immediately to show that the coming crisis has immediate implications for attitudes and actions concerning possessions. What is at stake, at the most basic level, is what our practices with regard to 'things' proclaim about our understanding of God and God's plans. The fool of vs. 13-21 takes no account of God in his plans, for example, and is therefore implicated in greed." (NISB, 1878)

READ ALSO LUKE 12:22-34:

"Inheritance, greed, and accumulation of wealth all figure in the parable and in its interpretation in the verses that follow the lectionary text (Luke 12:22-34); these verses are linked to 12:13-21 by the word 'therefore' and by the focus on what makes for life (the word translated "life" there and in 12:20 is translated 'soul' in the inner dialogue of the rich fool in 12:19), a connection reinforced by references to barns, treasure, possessions, and eating and drinking. Luke 12:22-34 never appears in the lectionary, so it is worth including it in this Sunday's worship, if possible, but even if it isn't read, it should be taken into account as part of Jesus' response to the problem raised by the brother in the crowd and as the antidote to the predicament of the greedy fool. . .

Like the story of the rich ruler where God's grace has the last word, so here also Jesus' teaching ultimately transcends the greed and God-less treasure of the parable to move in a hopeful direction with Luke 12:22-34. . . In this alternative message about God's faithfulness, Jesus recognizes that what underlies excessive accumulation is most often anxiety and fear. So Jesus offers the antidote to accumulation of too much empty treasure in the promise that it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom itself to his little flock. And the way to collect treasure of the heart suitable for that kingdom isn't the earthbound, inward-looking way of the barn guy but the soaring, beautiful way of the one who lives and loves generously, lavishly, and with joy." (Stamper, WP)

- *What basic principles do we learn from 12:22-34 about being "rich toward God."*

Day 1

Luke 12:13-21

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸Then he said, '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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Read through the entire Gospel lesson. We invite you to also read the preceding verses (vv. 1-12) and the verses following our reading (vv. 22-31) as Pastor Stoffregen suggests in the first item listed under "background" at the beginning of this study.

- We invite you to continue journaling as a part of your devotional/meditative time.

- Jot down any words or phrases that stand out to you.
- What do you think God might be saying in this story? Record this in your journal.

Day 2

Luke 12:13-14

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”

Background:

- 12:13 “Jesus is addressed as **Teacher** and asked to be the ‘divider’ ... of the estate. This serious business of adjudicating estates has never been easy, as any probate attorney knows. In first-century Palestine, the traditional ‘laws’ which governed such disputes were scriptural, especially Num. 27:8-11 and Deut. 21:16-17. The ‘teachers of the law’ were thus also the ‘lawyers’ in the public sense of probating estates.” (DT, 233)
 - “‘The father, following the old Israelite practice of family ownership, has left his farm as a unit to his two sons, but Jesus’ questioner asserts his right to have the property divided. The implication is that the man’s relationship with his brother has been ruptured by the desire for independent possession of his property’ (Bauckham, 380).
While the man addresses Jesus as teacher, he does not request instruction. Instead, he tells Jesus what he wants and asks (or commands) Jesus to do his bidding.” (L)
- 12:14 “...it is fascinating that Jesus refused the role of **judge** or **divider**. He clearly had no reservation about claiming authority as an interpreter of the Scriptures, and the Gospels are confident of his role as the Son of man who will exercise God’s final judgment. Furthermore, Jesus is consistently portrayed as concerned with justice, especially for the poor and the widow before the unrighteous judge (18:1-8). It is idle to guess whether Jesus thought this petitioner was underserving or whether he thought the whole case was only a greedy fight and this refused to take sides.” (DT, 233)
 - “This man’s self-interest clashes sharply with the context in which he makes his request — a context in which Jesus has been emphasizing spiritual values (12:1-12). By interjecting a request for help with his inheritance, this man reveals that he has not heard Jesus.” (L)

Reflection Question:

- How often you are preoccupied with your own “stuff” and don’t “hear” what Jesus is saying? Give an example(s).
- How does this preoccupation keep you from “seeing” the need of your “neighbor?”

Day 3

Luke 12:15

¹⁵And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Background:

- 12:15a “Jesus, who sees the heart, sees greed in this man’s heart. He addresses his reply, not just to the man, but to **‘them’** — to the crowd.

- “As in 6:20, Jesus may address the disciples, but he does so in the hearing of the crowds as well, just as his teaching to the crowds is delivered in the presence of the disciples. In fact, the ambiguity that actually characterizes the question of Jesus’ audience throughout this discourse surfaces explicitly in 12:41, where Peter wonders to whom Jesus has addressed his parabolic teaching. This is a reminder that the line between disciples and others is not always clearly defined, with Jesus giving instruction to his disciples that serves also to challenge and invite prospective followers. This is all the more remarkable when it is recognized that Jesus does not assess the crowds in a positive way in this narrative segment. In fact, he refers to them as ‘hypocrites’ (12:56), using the same epithet he has already used in his valuation of the Pharisees (12:1). That he admonishes the disciples to beware of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy, though, reminds us that their position as those who embody his teaching is not yet secure; they are not yet so different from the crowds that they are incapable of earning the hypocrite emblem themselves.” (JG, 478)
- 12:15b **“for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses.** ‘As in 10:25-37, then, ‘life’ is a metaphor for salvation” (Green, 489) — or ‘life’ could mean ‘a humanly meaningful and satisfying life’ (Nolland, 685).
The man who brought the grievance has focused his eyes close-up on possessions so that he sees nothing else. Jesus calls him to pull back so that the whole of life comes into view, an exercise that puts possessions in perspective (see also 4:4; 9:25; 12:22-23; 16:19-31; 18:24).” (L)
- **“Be on your guard against:** *horate & phyllasses* the present tense imperatives = continual action = ‘continually watch out (for)’ & ‘continually guard yourself from...’
Perhaps like alcoholics and their desire for alcohol, we are never cured of our greediness. We are always in recovery -- always in need to **watch out for** and to **guard** ourselves from this evil power in our lives.” (BPS)
- “In Luke’s’ narrative...Jesus, who is the Messiah and Son of man as well as the teacher of the Law, does not usurp the existing structures for resolving such questions. He rather takes the request as an occasion for a warning, and he remains in the role of a teacher. The division of estates is too often the source of divided families because of jealousy and greed, and the meaning of life begins to be measured in the quantity of possessions. Once again the scene is portrayed against the broader canvas of divine judgment, and the hazard that ‘I might not get my share!’ pales next to the peril posed by jealousy and greed to the meaning and worth of **life** itself.” (DT, 233)
- **“Greed** takes many forms in the sense that it has many objects. It can covet money, fame, sex, compliments, power, etc. But the appetite of greed is always the same: it eats yet remains hungry. The person cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of the desired objects. They always need more; but when they get more, this more is not enough. So they pursue again. Greed is an endless search for more that always leaves the searcher experiencing lack rather than fulfillment.
Once greed is triggered in a person, its fierce energy is difficult to curb. So Jesus advises not to let it get close. **‘Be on guard’** is an image of watching for an impending danger. It is as if greed is lurking outside on the edges of the person’s skin. It is waiting for an opportunity to sneak past lax defenses and seize possession of the house. If he does not **‘take care,’** one day he will awake and find himself inhabited by what he did not ward off.
Greed is always self-defeating because of its ultimate goal. It does not merely want more of its object. It has projected onto its object a power the object does not have. The object must give and/or secure life. ‘Life’ can mean physical survival, or it can mean a sense of meaning, or zest, or inner calm. This is the heart of the problem. Life in any of the above senses, does not consist in accumulating anything. In fact life cannot be possessed...This

poor petitioner only wanted Jesus to side with him. Instead, Jesus confronts him, suggesting his desire for equity might mask a foolish greed that will bring him to grief.” (JS, 215-216)

- “Our reality is that no matter how much we have, we are always aware of things we don’t have. We are bombarded by marketing wizards whose job it is to convince us of all the products we need to complete our lives. And so we never quite feel that we have enough.

Like the rich farmer, we are tempted to think that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us secure. Sooner or later, however, we learn that no amount of wealth or property can secure our lives. No amount of wealth can protect us from a genetically inherited disease, for instance, or from a tragic accident. No amount of wealth can keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart. In fact, wealth and property can easily drive a wedge between family members, as in the case of the brothers fighting over their inheritance at the beginning of this text.

Most importantly, no amount of wealth can secure our lives with God. In fact, Jesus repeatedly warns that wealth can get in the way of our relationship with God...” (Elisabeth Johnson, WP)

- “*pleonexias* -- (definition from Lowe & Nida's Greek-English Lexicon) ‘A strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions or to possess more things than other people have, all irrespective of need.’ The word is usually translated with *greed*, *avarice*, or *covetousness* ... If greed is a desire to get more -- then there is never a point where a greedy person has enough. Greed can never be satisfied. It is always looking to get more.” (BPS)

Reflection Questions:

- Where have you seen ‘greed’ in your own life and the life of the world around you? What have been the consequences of this ‘greed?’ If you have seen ‘greed’ as a problem in your life, what kinds of things are you doing to change this?
- “Luke offers a very simple cure for greed -- give up all your possessions. Greed with its emphasis on **getting** more and more is incompatible with the willingness to **give** away everything. What does this mean to people today? How do we live it?” (BPS)

Day 4

Luke 12:16-21

¹⁶Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’¹⁸Then he said, ‘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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Background:

- 12:16-20 “Greed is one of the perils of wealth, but the delusion of security is another. The previous exchange came to a focus on what is the substance of **life** (Gk: *zōē*, v. 15) and these verses revolve around the close synonym ‘soul’ (Gk: *psychē*, vv. 19-20). Here the rich fool even talks to his **soul** and says, ‘**Soul**,’ advising his *psyche* that enough is enough! It is time to take it easy and enjoy! He is not a picture of endless greed. He is not commended for tearing down his storehouses to build larger ones, but neither is he condemned for that, at least not directly. The foolishness of the man is that he thinks this hoard is enough to bring security and happiness to his **soul**.” (DT, 233-234)

- “This parable is a picture of **greed** in action... The physical act of possession is simple enough. He must find a larger container. He talks to himself about his action plan... but then he goes deeper, to the soul space, where the driving energy of his plans resides... In an ironic observation, he tells his soul to relax and enjoy the good times. What they—he and his soul—now possess will give them a life of sustenance and merriment. However ... the soul receives its life from God and gives this life into the mind, body, and world. It lives not by possession but by flow.” (JS, 216-217)
- 12:16-19 “Wrong! The soul is not merely his own concern, and he could never accumulate enough to bring security to his soul. He is not the one to give it orders, because it is not his own possession or under his control. Of course when God requires **[demands]** his soul, he dies; and all of his earthly goods falls into the hands of others. But the question of what happens to all the hoard (**whose will they be?**) is quite secondary. The **Fool** did not understand that God would ‘ask back’ his soul, to which he was giving such bad counsel about security and pleasure.” (DT, 234)
- 12:16 “The man was rich prior to this harvest, and the harvest simply increases his wealth. Jesus portrays a windfall harvest — a gift of God.” (L)
- 12:17 “The man talks with nobody but himself...**What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?**” ... ‘This speech is not sad, rather it is pitiful. This wealthy, self-confident man has arrived.... He needs an audience for his arrival speech. But...he can only address himself’ (Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 66).” (L)
- 12:18 “The first hint of a problem lies in the man's use of the first-person pronoun. Go through the parable and circle the words ‘I’ and ‘my’ to get a sense of the man's self-absorption. He gives no thought to his workers or to God.” (L)
 - “In interpreting this parable, it will be critical to assess carefully what the farmer's error is ... The relentless use of the first person pronouns ‘I’ and ‘my’ betray a preoccupation with self. There is no thought to using the abundance to help others, no expression of gratitude for his good fortune, no recognition of God at all. The farmer has fallen prey to worshiping the most popular of gods: the Unholy Trinity of ‘me, myself, and I.’ This leads to, and is most likely caused by, a second mistake. He is not foolish because he makes provision *for* the future; he is foolish because he believes that by his wealth he can *secure* his future...” (DL)
 - “...Jesus portrays the farmer as engaging in self-talk. Although this might seem perfectly natural in this setting, persons engaged in soliloquy are consistently portrayed negatively by Luke ... In this instance given the high level of interconnectedness characteristic of the village economy, it is worth asking why this farmer lays out a course of action in isolation from others whose well-being is affected by this decision.

... closely related, what is ‘good business practice’ for this wealthy farmer-landholder has detrimental consequences for the peasants and tenants who are his neighbors and who far outnumber him in the village economy. Not least because of his evidently vast landholdings and the magnitude of his surplus yield, his decision to hold back his produce will reflect harmfully on the regional economy. It will, at the same time, secure his economic power and position of status in the village as others are made more and more dependent on him ...in fact, the prudence we might attribute to this farmer-businessman is mitigated by the tardiness of his awareness of the problem he faces. Why did he not recognize the extent of his yield and take suitable action long before the time of harvest? Within the wider Lukan co-text, where Jesus castigates his audience for their failure to interpret correctly the signs before them (11:14-32; 12:54-56), the farmer’s failure to read the signs is incriminating.” (JG, 490-491)
- 12:20 “The last line substitutes himself **[themselves]** for **his soul** and indicates the ultimate folly of listening to this man talk to himself. He had done an excellent job of looking out for himself (his **soul**, his *psychē*), even knowing enough to quit accumulating. His foolishness

was not mere greed, but self-concern, 'enlightened self-interest,' that could not see beyond the self. Even his 'self-understanding' turned out to be foolishness rather than wisdom because it blinded him to the truth. His life, his soul—he—was accountable to God." (DT, 234)

- 12:20 "This farmer has sought to secure himself and his future without reference to God. This is the force of the label given him by God, 'fool,' used in the LXX to signify a person who rebels against God or whose practices deny God [footnote: See e.g., Prov 14:1; Jer 4:22] -- a usage that coheres with the representation of 'greed' (v. 15) as a form of idolatry. He did not consider that his life was on loan from God. Failing to account for the will of God in his stratagems, he likewise failed to account for the peril to life constituted by the abundance of possessions (v. 15) and for the responsibility that attends the possession of wealth. He thus appears as one of several exemplars of the wealthy over whom 'woe' is pronounced in the Gospel of Luke (cf. 6:24). Such persons are not simply those with possessions, but more particularly those whose dispositions are not toward the needs of those around them, whose possessions have become a source of security apart from God, and, thus, whose possessions deny them any claim to life." (JG, 491)
 - "'Fool,' says God. The word occurs elsewhere in Luke only in Luke 11:40, with reference to the Pharisees; there too foolishness is associated with greed and with the neglect of justice and the love of God." (Stamper, WP)
 - "The rich farmer is a fool not because he is wealthy or because he saves for the future, but because he appears to live only for himself, and because he believes that he can secure his life with his abundant possessions ... He is blind to the fact that his life is not his own to secure, that his life belongs to God, and that God can demand it back at any time." (Elisabeth Johnson, WP)
 - "There is an... interesting contrast between 'many years' (v. 19) and 'tonight' (v. 20). 'The foolishness of the farmer's narrow aims is highlighted by the contrast between his many years of supply and the few hours that remain to him' (Nolland, 687). **The things which you have prepared - whose will they be?** (v. 20b). The person who loves possessions guards them jealously. The thought of someone squandering his/her wealth would be painful indeed. However, when he/she dies, plans begin to fail." (L)
 - "God will **demand** the man's soul. But lurking as an alternative is the possibility that the antecedent is none other than the man's goods themselves. His possessions will take his life from him. [Culpepper, *Luke*, p. 256]" (BPS)
- 12:21 "This story, as all moral tales, ends with a lesson. You can **store up treasures** for yourself, thinking they will give you life. But this way of thinking and acting goes against the grain of the life you want. So it is a self-defeating strategy. However, there is another way, It is called '**rich toward God.**' ..." (JS, 217)
 - "The two notions, storing up treasure and being rich toward God, are verbal forms with the same roots as the noun 'treasure' and adjective 'rich.' In other words, it isn't a question of something we happen to have or a characteristic among many. We actively choose to do one thing or the other, to be rich with barns or rich with God, to serve God or mammon (Luke 16:13)." (Stamper, WP)
 - "According to Luke, 'life' or 'being rich towards God' comes in giving away possessions, relying on God rather than self, looking to the future, rather than just the present." (BPS)
 - "We should not assume that this verse applies only to Microsoft Millionaires. The jeopardy applies to all who 'lays up treasure for himself' and who 'is not rich toward God.'" (L)
 - "What does it look like to be **rich toward God**? First, it must surely mean being thankful to God for our blessings. Second, it must mean stewardship that returns God's portion to God. Thirdly, it must mean generosity toward the neighbor whom Jesus has charged to love (10:27) — and to our enemy, whom Jesus has also charged us to love (6:27)." (L)

Reflection Questions:

- How is Jesus' parable an answer to the person in verse 13?
- Have you in your life ever found yourself thinking like the rich man is thinking? If yes, talk about the experience. How does Jesus' words in this Scripture help you look at this experience? Ask God what he is hoping you are learning from this experience and from Jesus' words?
- Rewrite in your own words verse 21. How does this apply to your life?

Day 5

Reread the entire Scripture:

- Does anything significant or new stand out for you with this reading?
- After studying and meditating on this Scripture, what do you think God might be saying to you?
- **What difference do the two readings (Luke 12:13-21 and Luke 12:22-34) make in how you live your life . . . or how you would like to live your life?**

Reread the entire Scripture again.

- What prayer rises up in you (what would you like to say to God) after reflecting (listening to what God had to say to you) on this Scripture?

Reflection questions:

- Pastor Edward F. Marquart (Sermonsfromseattle.com) asks: "Why is it foolish to primarily live for oneself and one's pleasures?" How would you answer this question after studying this Gospel lesson?
- In your own words, why does Jesus call the rich man in the parable "Fool?"
- From *serendipity New Testament for Groups*: "In planning an investment portfolio to become 'rich toward God,' what will you do?" Include steps you might take in working toward this goal. Record this 'portfolio' in your journal and refer back to it from time to time...not to beat yourself up if you have gotten off track...but to ask God to help you get back on track.
- Stoffregen asks: "What difference should our faith in God make of the practical matters of life?" Journal. Also think about what difference your faith in God already makes. Journal.
- Stoffregen also asks: "Will we as Americans interpret our actions as less greedy than the way a South American peasant farmer or a Somali would interpret our actions?" How do you answer this question?

Quote from Pastor Brian Stoffregen

"During all the furor over 'The Church and Human Sexuality' draft from the ELCA, in our adult study class, I suggested that what may be just as needed is a statement on 'The Church and Human Greed.' What would such a statement say? There certainly are more biblical texts about greed than about human sexuality (especially homosexuality)."

A quote found in Lectionary.com

“The issue here is not ownership *of* possessions but ownership *by* possessions. Faith in wealth crowds out faith in God. It is not money that is the problem, but love of money (1 Timothy 6:10).”

Quote by David Lose, WP

“... Only as we recognize that the gifts of ultimate worth, dignity, meaning, and relationship are just that - gifts offered freely by God - can we hope to place our relative wealth in perspective and be generous with it toward others.”

And

“. . . the problem isn't [our] money, but our penchant to look to money, rather than to God and each other, for life.”

Excerpts from three suggestions made by David Lose “to get us started toward a different way of living and being and relating to each other and to God:” (*from Dear Working Preacher, 2013*)

- 1) *Start the conversation.* 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 our people will hear. Keep in mind, as you start the conversation, that 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 communities and tradition can help us live into the kind of abundant life that material wealth can support but cannot produce.
- 2) *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. . . 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. So invite people 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.
- 3) *Form a community of support.* Given the overwhelming message of the culture that highlights our inadequacies (in order to sell us solutions) rather than our blessings, living into the abundant life Jesus promises is incredibly hard and almost impossible to do alone. So invite congregation members to join you in imagining how your faith community can be a place of mutual conversation and support in living into the kingdom life Jesus describes. One congregation I know invited families to not buy any unnecessary new thing for six months in order to break the culturally-induced habit of trying to buy happiness. But they didn't just invite people to do this, they formed a culture in which they supported each other. They read and talked about a common book on abundant life, they kept in touch via small groups and email, they shared where they were succeeding and struggling and what they were learning. In short, they formed a community so that they could stand against the all-too-human and culturally

supported belief that if we just had a little more we'd be happy. Any congregation can do this and many other similar things..."

Quote from commentary by Elisabeth Johnson, WP

"It is all about priorities. It is about who is truly God in our lives. It is about how we invest our lives and the gifts that God has given us. It is about how our lives are fundamentally aligned: toward ourselves and our passing desires, or toward God and our neighbor, toward God's mission to bless and redeem the world..."

... Our lives and possessions are not our own. They belong to God. We are merely stewards of them for the time God has given us on this earth. We rebel against this truth because we want to be in charge of our lives and our stuff.

Yet this truth is actually good news. Because all that we are and all that we have belongs to God, our future is secure beyond all measure..."

Quote by Stephen P. McCutchan,
in *Water from the Rock, Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*)

"At some level, most of us know that our lives do not consist in an abundance of possessions, but we are still seduced by the possibility of gaining sufficient possessions so that we will be free to focus on other things that really count. The problem is that the measure of what is enough keeps changing..."

The Bible seems to have the perspective that everything that exists belongs to God (Psalm 24:1) and that what we have is on loan to us for the sake of the whole community. In a culture that almost worships the concept of private possessions, this is a very hard concept to accept. But even if we accepted this theoretically, the problem is affected by our fears and our low concept of humanity. The theory is that if we have a lot this year, we should share it with our needy neighbors so that next year, if we are in need, our neighbor will share with us (2 Corinthians 8:13-14). Our own tendency to covet makes us fearful that our neighbor will covet as well; therefore, we enter a whole cycle of fear rather than love for our neighbor.

While we may not arrive at a state of perfect generosity, we can recognize the power of greed to distort our very nature. The alternative suggested is that we focus on being rich toward God. As we move step by step to that focus, perhaps we will feel the burden of the material lessening in our lives and our capacity to be generous without fear increasing." (pp. 236-237)

Psalm 49

¹Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world,

²both low and high, rich and poor together.

³My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.

⁴I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp.

⁵Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me,

⁶those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?

⁷Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it.

⁸For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice

⁹that one should live on forever and never see the grave.

¹⁰When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others.

¹¹Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own.

¹²Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish.