

Wesley United Methodist Church      Rev. Beverly E Stenmark  
August 4, 2019  
Title: The Love Never Stops Here  
Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

A class of kindergarteners went blueberry picking. One of the little boys did not like blueberries, but his sister loved them, and he promised to bring home lots of big juicy blueberries for her. He talked excitedly about picking berries for her to have for dinner. When he came home, he was eager to show the blueberries to his sister but when she asked if she could have some, his smile faded, and he told her that she could have two. Expecting that he was going to just give her the whole sandwich bag full of them, she was confused, but carefully took and ate two blueberries. Over the next few hours he carefully doled out two blueberries at a time and insisted that he needed to save the rest.

This was probably his first experience with actually working hard to get something and he was carefully trying to preserve the fruit of his labor. While he loved his sister, the experience of having something completely under his control, something he had earned and worked hard for introduced new feelings of possessiveness that he had not experienced before. He struggled with the concept of what he owned and how much he should give away, and how much he should keep. I doubt that the reality that blueberries will not last forever even entered his young mind.

This normally outgoing generous child suddenly turned inward and became possessive of his blueberries. Remember, this boy doesn't even like blueberries. He thinks they are yucky! The experience caused me to reflect upon how humans default to preserving what we own and being possessive of it.<sup>i</sup>

Jesus tells a parable about this that can really be quite disturbing. Someone tried to put Jesus in the middle of a family dispute about how much of the family inheritance one brother should share with the other. There were very clear laws of inheritance division in the scripture and Jesus recognized the question for what it really was – a question about greed. We don't now which brother was greedier than the other, and Jesus, as he so often did, used this as an opportunity to teach about something much more important. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Then he went on to tell a parable of a rich man whose land produced so abundantly that he could not fit it all into his barns. He decided to tear them down and build larger ones. Here's where the parable can get quite disturbing. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with what the man did. It's called estate planning. It's called planning for the future. Generally, we consider people who do this to be responsible people.

A couple of weeks ago I met with my financial advisor. The primary questions on my mind were, "will I have enough money to live on when I retire and how much can I afford to spend on housing". I doubt if anyone, including Jesus, would find fault in my attention to these details. Most of us who have enough to eat and roofs over our heads may need to be careful to pay attention and to be on guard that these concerns do not become the focus of our lives with two likely resulting behaviors.

These are the things that Jesus warns against in the parable and elsewhere in the scripture. The result that the rich man in the parable desired was that he would then have so much saved up that for many years he could "relax, eat, drink, (and) be merry". For the little boy with the blueberries, it was fear of running out, not having enough so he was very

cautious in his sharing – even though he didn't need and didn't even like the blueberries that he was protecting.

The rich man in the parable is called a “fool” by God – pretty strong and insulting language. “Tonight, you will die. Now who will get all the things you have prepared for yourself?” The problem with the rich man was that he was thinking only about himself. He did not think about how many people he could help with his abundant crops, how many hungry people could be fed, or how much good he could do.

He was thinking only about himself and the wealth he had accumulated would go to someone else when he died. Following the death of a wealthy person, the story is told that someone asked, “How much did he leave behind?” And the response was, “Everything.”<sup>ii</sup>

Jesus concludes his story by saying, “This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren't rich toward God.” The point is that life that is centered on accumulating all we can for ourselves and holding tightly to it, thinking only of ourselves, is not really life. True life, Jesus says, is being “rich toward God.”

Jesus warns us that the seduction of having more and keeping it for ourselves is so powerful that we have to actively be on guard against it. The General Board of Discipleship notes for today says that this “‘Being on guard’ is the active watchfulness of a shepherd protecting the sheep, or a soldier on the wall of a city watching for any possible invaders. Be on the lookout for this while it's still far off. Don't let it come near. If it does, fight it away. There is no form of the ongoing desire for more that isn't addictive and deadly. As the Lay's potato chip commercials used to say, ‘You can't eat just one!’”<sup>iii</sup>

But it's more than just guarding against greed. Keeping something away, means keeping something else close. What we are to keep close, what we are to value is being "rich toward God". It's about "what we do in our lives, about the very flow of the activities of our days. Are we storing things up for ourselves, gathering and getting, being consumers, primarily? Or are we using whatever we have gathered in, sharing the love, to promote God's kingdom in the life of the world?"<sup>iv</sup>

Richness toward God isn't measured by what we gather in, but what we do with what we have, how it is used to share God's love. "The love we've been given is never to stop with us." This idea of being rich toward God is something that every disciple of Jesus can expect to attain. It's not about money or material possessions. It's about our pattern of behavior. It's about how we live our lives.<sup>v</sup>

Did you notice that at the very beginning, Jesus said to be on guard "against all kinds of greed"? I think Jesus is talking about a lot more than the things we own that we can touch. In the Epistle reading for today, that we didn't read, Paul says in Colossians 3:5 that greed is idolatry. Idolatry is anything that we worship that is not God. I read this week that "The opposite of the love we're called and empowered for isn't hate. It's greed."<sup>vi</sup>

I started to think about what some of these "all kinds of greed" that we are to guard against might include. I would suggest to you that we may see this in many places. We may see it in those who are so afraid that they will lose some of their rights and privileges if others have those same rights. I don't think they would express it that way, but I do think that there is some greed in wanting to keep those rights and privileges for one particular group of people rather than letting them extend to others. It's not so much the greed of wanting more, but the greed of hoarding and preserving

something so that no one else can have them, or so you don't run out, or lose what you have.

This is the season of backyard gardens that may produce abundantly for a short time. I'm eating freshly picked cucumbers because Kristen is getting an overabundance of them from her garden and sharing them with me and with others. One of my friends is the pastor of a church in the city. They have set up a table in front of the church where parishioners and others bring their excess garden produce to share with people from the neighborhood. They are sharing out of their abundance – using what they have to help others. They are using these vegetables to share God's love with others.

They are taking seriously the gospel and the message that says that “whatever you do for the least of these you do for me.” In feeding their community, it is like feeding Christ. This is just one of many examples of using our possessions in ways that make us rich toward God.

I don't think Jesus is saying that having an abundance of possessions is bad in itself. What Jesus is saying is that we need to be careful otherwise we “can end up using our entire lives taking care of them” and wasting time that we “might have spent pursuing a relationship with God, who is the source of our lives and the one who holds the key to abundant living.”<sup>vii</sup>

I would invite us to think honestly and carefully about the ways that our possessions may get in the way of our being rich toward God. Do our possessions as individuals and as a church help us to draw closer to God or separate us? I pray that we will heed Jesus' warning to be “on guard against all kinds of greed” so that we are continually living out of love, sharing that love, and growing rich toward God.

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<sup>ii</sup> This is a personal experience with my grandchildren that occurred a couple of weeks ago. It has been shortened and edited for the sake of time and purpose.

<sup>ii</sup> Source unknown. Heard many times in many places.

<sup>iii</sup> [www.gbod.org/worship](http://www.gbod.org/worship) Notes for August 4, "Learning From the Master"

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

<sup>v</sup> Ibid

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid