

“Where do you make your deposit?”

Luke 12:13-21

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Brentwood First Presbyterian

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Comedian Jack Benny did a skit which illustrates how we place money ahead of everything. He is walking down the street when suddenly an armed robber approaches him, saying, "Your money or your life!" There is a long pause. Jack does nothing. The robber impatiently asks, "Well?" Jack replies, "Don't rush me, I'm thinking it over." Many of Jesus' parables and the things he did involved care of the soul. Most of his sermon or monologue on the mount for example was group psychotherapy. You know, blessed are the poor in spirit, and so forth. But many of Jesus' sermons and parables are occasions where he unmasked idolatry and called his disciples to action. Today's lesson is one of these. Today we hear Jesus unmasking idolatry and calling us to action. We hear about a farmer whose barns are full but whose heart is empty.

Jesus tells the younger brother a parable, **“The land produced abundantly.”** There was a church in England, which purchased land and planted hardwood trees in the 1800s when the church was built. Their thought was that if and when the wooden arches rotted, that there would be trees to build new arches to replace them. Now that is stewardship! Those trees were worth a lot to the church 100 years later when the wooden arches did indeed rot. The land produced trees abundantly, and the church was a good steward.

Our church building has been paid off. The Shelharts, the Winns, the Kings, and the Bakers, and many others not present today, tithed not just of their time, but also of their life's earnings. Instead of just giving their time, they also gave of their life savings. Instead of saying, "I give my time to God, I do not need to give my money;" instead of keeping it for themselves, they gave their life's earnings to pay off the mortgage on this building and property. It is done. The mortgage papers have been burned. Like the forest of trees planted by that church in England, our church property has value. It is worth a lot. Like that church in England, we can thank those who came before us. We the newcomers are eternally grateful, that the financial tithe now given by the visitors, the members, and the elders, can now be spent ushering in the kingdom at the Downtown Presbyterian soup kitchen, in Guatemala, and by paying for utilities, mowing the lawn, and upkeep so we have a place to worship. Just like the equity in the church property, our missions are worth a lot. And because of the tithing of our predecessors, we can now support missions instead of just continuing to pay down the mortgage.

Yes, **“The land produced abundantly.”** We did not produce the crop; the land produced the crop. In other words, God produced the crop. We like to think everything in our possession belongs to us. That we got it the old fashioned way. That we earned it. But God knows differently. Everything we possess belongs not to us, but to God. We are but stewards. As that church in England was a good

steward with its equity, we also are called to be good stewards of the equity in our church property.

Truth be told, when we hear this parable of Jesus, we find ourselves rather envious of this man. A financially successful man—we see him as savvy and wise. Yet, Jesus concluded the story by saying that this man was a fool. The issue before us this morning is then: what did this man, this barn-builder, do wrong? To answer that question we must understand that this is not a parable about money. It is a parable about values and what is important in life.

God's concluding remark in Jesus' parable, is **“The things you have prepared, whose will they be?”** When I read these words in the parable, my mind goes off on a slight tangent. Because I think possessions and life are like a board game. Take Monopoly. The way to win in Monopoly is to earn as much money and property as you can. But at the end of the game, it all goes back in the box. It belongs to no one. The game is over, and it all goes back in the box. Possessions and life are like that. We earn as much money and property as we can. We try to pay off all our loans. But at the end of our life, it all goes back to God. It belongs to no one. Not us, not the bank, no one. The game is over, and it all goes back to God. It is only money. It all goes back in the box.

It is not our lives or souls we play with in Monopoly or in our personal finances, but only money. This is a liberating word to us all. It helps us understand that money is simply a tool that we are to possess and not to own.

Abraham Lincoln was once walking down the street with two boys. Each of the boys was crying. Someone shouted over to Abe and asked what was wrong with the two boys. He said, "The same thing that is wrong with the rest of the world. I have one walnut and each boy wants it." It is said the sooner we learn that the things that we have are a gift from God to use and not to own, the better off we will be.

I do not know for sure, FOR how much our church property would be appraised. My guess is that building and land would be appraised at one million dollars. This is more than the mortgage paid in. The equity has appreciated greatly in the last few years. And my guess is that the way Brentwood is developing, it will be worth 2 million in 10 years. But to what end? What good is the equity in this building and property if we do not use it to usher in God's commonwealth? We will never sell the property unless we close the church. And I NEVER foresee THAT happening. Yes it was fun to burn the mortgage several years ago, after the members of this church spent so long paying it. But how much more fun will it be to take a mortgage on one tenth of the worth of the property, and apply it to the start up costs of a ministry that ushers in God's kingdom? What if we would not even have to pay the monthly note from our tithe. One of our congregation members suggests we could pay the monthly note from the tuition of the mother's day out. So we can continue using our tithe to usher in the kingdom in the Downtown Presbyterian soup kitchen and in Guatemala.

Getting my MBA degree many years ago was to me a dark time in my life. It was a dark time because the notion of accumulating wealth, of gathering crops to put in a barn, is contrary to who I think I am. But finally I see how I am going to

put my MBA degree to use. I am no longer overwhelmed by the money issues, because I see how we can pay off the mortgage used to start up our mother's day out. And there is a reason to put the equity in the church property to use in this manner.

“One’s life does not consist of the abundance of one’s possessions.” Can you see the crowd pushing Jesus? Can you smell the sweat of bodies out in the hot sun in Palestine. A young man with a frown on his face has decided Jesus is a judge like those in the Hebrew Bible. Like Deborah and some of the other judges. So he asks Jesus to arbitrate a family dispute. A dispute over inheritance. But Jesus does not quite give him the answer he is expecting. In fact, he gives him an answer he does not want. Jesus is always doing things like that. He says, “Here comes greed!” He says life is not about being financially secure.

Two boys fight over a wagon. "What are you doing with my wagon?" cried Charles. "I am just playing with it," said Jim. "You weren't using it." "Well, give it back," said Charles, "it's mine." "Then you cannot play with my basketball," said Jim. Shortly after Charles had taken his wagon away from the younger brother, it was again sitting idle.

Our houses are like that. We have filled them with things we no longer need. Our houses are cluttered with things. Things we do not use. But they are things we like to look at. Because we derive comfort from looking at things we do not use.

That famous preacher of the fifth century, John Chrysostom, said that coat in your locker that you are not using does not belong to you. It belongs to the poor. Having extra money to deposit into a bank is nice, but a recent preacher said, why not instead deposit it into the stomach of the poor?

“This very night your life is being demanded of you.” This is the NRSV translation from what was written in Greek almost 2000 years ago. But the Greek verb here is actually the third person pleural, “they will demand.” A common translation is that the pleural is the divine passive for God. But an alternative translation, since the subject is unstated, is that the antecedent is the rich farmer’s possessions. Those possessions he stored in the barn. I believe the parable suggests that possessions and storing one’s wealth in barns sucks the life out of us. That storing up in barns is a form of idolatry.

I believe the point of the story is not that there is something wrong with having extra crops, but that the farmer was intending to store it all. He is called "foolish" because he does not recognize the wealth that brings him happiness could do the same for others if only it were not locked up in barns. His brokenness is not that he is wealthy, but that he wants to hoard his wealth. His brokenness is not that he eats, drinks and is merry, but that he withholds the means for others to do the same. He becomes a bottleneck in the flow of blessings to others.

Our church already participates in Downtown Presbyterian’s soup kitchen in Nashville. Our church already supports and visits missionaries Gloria and Roger Marriott in Guatemala. But I believe that we now listen to the needs of our

community. And I hear this community, a community whose average age is 40, saying it needs more day care for its children. Because all the preschools have waiting lists over 100 names long. Wouldn't it be nice to enhance our connection to the communities of Brentwood and Franklin? I believe one way we can do this by responding to our community's need.

A forest of trees planted for a time when they would be needed. The unused coat in your closet. Wagons, basketballs, and walnuts. They all go back in the box. We tithe not just our precious time, but also our financial resources. For our donated time will not buy timber. Our time will not buy food for the poor. Our time will not buy fluoride for the teeth of Mayan children in Guatemala.

I have a question for you today. The question is, "Where do you make your deposit?" I want you to think about this question this week, every time you see a homeless person with a sign that says, "I am hungry." Every time you hear about the elections and violence in Guatemala. Every time you hear about the shortage of child care in Brentwood. Every time you drive by this expensive piece of real estate. Where do you make your deposit? In the bank of self? Or in the bank of God?

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's people say, ...