Text: Luke 12:13-21

**Introduction**

It is something of a common observation that Jesus has more to say about money in the gospels than about insert whatever subject you are discussing that people want to stop talking about. That observation has a hint of truth in it. Although part of that truth is that disagreeing with Jesus on money seems to be a universal across time and peoples, so he talked about it a lot. Disagreeing with Jesus on other areas of the law wasn’t as radical. The Pharisees didn’t really disagree with Jesus on marriage and sexuality, they just thought he was impractical. It takes the 21st century to find clerics that will disagree with Jesus directly there. But that observation about Jesus speaking about money isn’t really an invitation to move the conversation to money. When it is invoked it is instead a conversation stopper. Because nobody wants to talk about how we use money or our responsibilities in its use.

**Text**

One of the reasons that nobody ever wants to have that conversation – and why Jesus seemed to have it all the time – is that it always feels like the law. It always condemns us. I hope to at least open the door to the gospel here.

The introduction to the gospel lesson starts understandably enough, “teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” We can recognize this on a small scale. While most inheritances might not rise to siblings suing each other. I don’t think I’ve seen one yet that there isn’t some “mom always did love you best.” Or, “you took all the china and the best furniture, why are you taking the car as well.” There is always something to argue about. Somebody’s mental accounting that feels unbalanced. Writ large this is part of the housing cost complaints and the gen-z vs. boomer arguments. It is not a completely fair argument, and there are reasons for it, but everything in our economy has been arranged to concentrate the nation’s wealth in elderly hands. Every complaint in this debate is “divide the inheritance fairly”, or the prodigal’s, “give me my share of the inheritance.”

And Jesus’ response is two fold. The first – “who made me judge over you” – is tricky. Because one answer, which is true, would be God the Father. “He will come to judge the living and the dead.” But the implied answer here is that how inheritances and money and the like are used and employed are completely up to those who have them. Jesus does not mandate anything. But the second part of his answer does warn us that our use of money is more spiritually illuminating than we tend to think. “Be on your guard against covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Whether it is a fascination with the Forbes 400 richest people on the planet, or a constant checking of your brokerage balance, or the losing game of comparative suffering or which generation had it tougher, there is a spiritual trap that instead money and vocations being the God given means of providence to support our lives and our neighbors, our lives themselves become about collecting. And the teacher of Ecclesiastes captures the troubles here. “to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting...even in the night his heart does not rest.” That is the line in all hearts that we should be on guard not to cross. When our hoards are more meaningful than our lives.

The parable is Jesus illustration of the heart that has gone over that line. The providence of God has richly blessed them man and continues to do so. “The land produced plentifully.” But the man first thoughts are not about thanksgiving to God. Nor about duty to his neighbor. For the law is summarized in love God and your neighbor. But the man’s first thoughts are how can I hoard this. “Tear down these barns and build bigger ones.” And his second thought are about how all of it can be used solely for his pleasure and enjoyment. “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

And Jesus repeats his warning. Don’t let covetousness eat your soul. “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

**Moral**

Now I think I can make this extremely personal. Our congregation has something of a money problem. Week after week we take in about $1,500 less than goes out the door. This congregation has been living off of a large contribution for years.

Now you can say that it is an expense problem. I’d tell you, and anyone familiar with congregational financing would tell you it isn’t an expense problem except in maybe one area. 22 or more years after taking out a mortgage to build this place, that mortgage still exists. It was refinanced multiple times if I received the story straight. Lengthened each time.. In the entire run of near zero interest rates in recent years, it was never attempted to pay it off. We’ve paid off more in the past 18 months than years prior. It started out as an offhand observation, but our congregational deficit is roughly what we are paying on the still existent mortgage. If that debt had been retired or kept on the original schedule it would have been retired with our recent efforts. We would not have budgetary troubles.

This is not all of us obviously. And as Jesus said, nobody made me judge of you personally. How you use your money is your decision. But collectively or as a metaphor, I’ll bet we have torn down houses and put up new ones. We’ve relaxed, had wonderful meals and made merry. While the church has limited itself and passed up many kingdom opportunities because of finances.

A congregation this size should not have these monetary troubles.

**Christology**

So how does one find the good news – the gospel – in the midst of this? The law has given the warning. Check your hearts and lives. Be on your guard against all covetousness. Of equating your possessions with your life.

But such a situation is also just how God invites us to be part of the kingdom. When we pray “Your kingdom come” we know that God’s kingdom will certain come without our prayers, what we are praying is that the Kingdom comes to us also. Budgetary problems are first and always an invitation to participate in the Kingdom. Because congregations – for better or worse – are how Jesus decided to build his kingdom. As he said to Peter when he makes his confession that “You are the Christ.” Jesus’ response to him that is on this rock – on this confession – that He will build his church. The promise is that wherever two or three of you are gathered in my name, there I will be. As the creeds also make plain, The Holy Spirit works through the One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church to Baptize, forgive sins and prepare for the resurrection and the world to come.

And people can have all kinds of trouble with the church. It is made up of sinners after all. But this is the means by which God has chosen to proclaim the good news about his sin Jesus. Until the day he comes in glory, under water, under bread and wine, in the foolishness of preaching is how the Kingdom comes to us.

And it takes men and women with that Kingdom vision to support her in this age. Every budgetary problem is an invitation to see the Kingdom come in your midst. To be rich toward God. And in another of the constant refrains of Jesus about money. You will be repaid now and in the age to come. (Luke 18:30, Mark 10:30).

**Eschatological**

The profit Malachi address such a budgetary problem once. It’s in chapter 3 of Malachi. Haggai does something of the same in chapter 1. Both of them are about rebuilding the temple. And both of them are encouragements to “bring in the full tithe.” When you find that you live in paneled houses, but the house of God is a shambles. Malachi has God saying that is the sign of robbing God. “How have we robbing you?” Israel responds. And God says, “in your tithes and offerings.”

But God does stop with the judgement of the law. He says, “bring the full tithe in…put me to the test…see if I will not open the windows of heave for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

And this is not preaching the prosperity gospel. That blessing may be treasure in heaven. That blessing may be the peace of God. That blessing may be something else. Maybe the teach of Ecclesiastes thought that “there is nothing better for a person than that he should eat, drink and find enjoyment in you toil.” If your treasure is secure which Christ in heaven, your worries in this life are greatly reduced. Unlike the rich man who wanted that blessing, he had to manage the tearing down and the building of bigger barns first. And we all know the problems in such enterprises. Cost rise. Everyone knows that now is the time to get your share. You might not live to see it complete.

Bring it in…put God to the test…and see the Kingdom come to you. Amen.