

What is Your Legacy?

Luke 12:13-34

Elizabeth M. Deibert

Peace Presbyterian Church

Gratitude/All Saints

5 November 2017

Page | 1

Jenni Holt's parents' church got a new pastor, 55 years old. He suddenly died in the church cemetery about a week ago. I just spend time with my mom, who is in her nineties, which ordinarily means – final decade. I hear her coming to terms with the many things she is no longer able to do. As I ponder the brevity of life – I have wondered for her and for myself: What is the legacy? As we celebrate All Saints Day today, I ask you: What is your legacy? What commitments and loyalties? What character traits?

Richard and I had a conversation about our own deaths last night. We were remarking that if one of us died suddenly, it would be difficult to know who to ask to lead to service of witness to resurrection. We have many good friends in this congregation who are ministers. And we, like many of you, want to make sure that whatever our estate, a portion of it belongs to our church family. A legacy gift that speaks of our commitment to God, not just our love of our family.

For some of you, I will be the one who leads your memorial service. What do you hope I will say about you? You know what I hope? I hope it is not hard to figure out what to say. I hope the long list of faithful Christian attributes will be rolling off my tongue. And I hope I'll be able to say that you were very actively engaged in your faith and generous toward God and God's people – generous with your time, your talent, and of course, your treasure. It takes a lot of trust in God to be generous with your treasure. Of course, the amount is not the issue, the spirit of generosity is. What's generous for one (like the widow who gave two small coins) is not nearly enough for another person to be called generous.

We're reading the Parable of the Rich Fool who died suddenly. This parable follows an argument about inheritance, and this parable precedes lots of reassurance from Jesus that we do not need to worry about having enough. We just need to be generous toward God and one another. Hear the Gospel.

Luke 12:13-34

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

¹⁵ And 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."

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷

Page | 2

And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ Then 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. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰ But 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?' ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

²² He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you-- you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

³¹ Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NRS)

Family tension over the inheritance. I've never heard of such a thing, have you? Just kidding. In the moment of grief, possessiveness (which was there before) rises to the surface. "How can you take that, when I'm the one who took care of her these last years?" Why do these possessions become so significant? Because they are symbols of love and power. They are what's left when the person is gone. So everyone gets a little or a lot selfish in that moment of loss. Add to that a late marriage or a great economic disparity among beneficiaries or any sense of imbalance prior to death and whew, it can be miserable. I'm losing someone special, so I need to grab what I can and cling. Firstborn sons had the right to keep it all in the first century, so presumably this is another son or daughter, thinking that sharing is the only kind and just thing to do. Jesus warns both of them about the dangers of greed, when we are too focused on an abundance of possessions.

Then he tells the story of rich man who built a bigger barn, rather than sharing his abundance with others. Most of us tend to assume this parable is for someone else, for someone richer than I am. But the bigger barn parable relates to so many aspects of our lives. When you have more food than you need....when you have more clothes than you need....when you have more furniture than you need....when you have more money than you need...are you thinking of ways to organize, save, and maximize the benefit of excess for yourself, or are you thinking of ways to simplify and be generous? The parable suggests that this will shorten your life – clinging to too many possessions.

Jesus goes on to say that we can trust God to provide everything we need, so we do not need to worry. Why do we cling to too much stuff, too much money? Fear of a day when we will be in need. You never know when you might need....(fill in the blank). A down coat in Florida? I don't think so.

But for most of us, as for most of Jesus' listeners, the issue is how to get by on less than abundance. How to be satisfied with just enough. He said to the disciples who dropped their nets and income to follow him: Do not worry. Maybe you don't know exactly how you are going to make it, but with God's help you will.

To us he might say this: Maybe you cannot go shopping as often as you'd like. Maybe you are having to cut many corners and coupons and eat out less frequently. Maybe you need to find ways to shave off the power bill and the travel budget and the bundled charge for internet, phone and TV. Maybe you have to take your lunch rather than spending ten dollars eating out. Maybe you order water when eating out. Maybe you drink tap or invest in a water filter, instead of buying bottled water. Maybe you have to wear the same clothes or shoes for another year or two or ten years, if they still fit. Maybe your home improvement is to worry less about home improvements and more about heart improvement. Maybe you could keep your car longer, rather than trading in on the latest and greatest. Maybe your new exercise program is mowing your own grass and cleaning your own house, instead of paying for them and a gym membership. I cannot tell you how you can save, nor can you tell me. But we are all capable of simplifying our lives and diminishing our expenses in one way or another. The book based on John Wesley's simple rules for money, Earn. Save. Give challenges us to think about how we can save more, so that we have enough to share. Many of us are past the extra earning phase of life – except that we can still decide how to invest, spend, or share what we have.

So wherever you are in life – whether you are living on a tight budget or a free one, whether you are still employed or living on your pension, whether you are giving consistently to God or giving occasionally...all of us need to hear these messages: Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Watch out for your own greed and your own particular ways of storing up your own treasures, instead of being generous toward God. Put God first and stop worrying. It makes God happy to provide for you everything you need. So seek the heavenly treasures, simplify your life, and give offerings. Know that whatever you invest in, will have your heart. Are you invested with God, or just with your pension plan? Are you seeking to please God, or just please yourself and your children? Are you being generous, or are you fearful, unable to trust that God will take care of you? **Where your treasure is..**

What will your legacy be? Imagine with me that day when you greet the saints in the afterlife, when you come face to face with God. Will you be able to say in good conscience in the company of these saints, “I gave you all I could give, dear God” in the presence of the widow of the Bible who has inspired generations of Christians by giving her last little bit of money. Will you be able to say, “I gave all I could give” in the presence of the saint from an impoverished country, who died at age 5 due to unclean water? As you settle yourself at the Christ’s table with a faithful man, who struggled to get by as a yard worker in the Jim Crow South in the first half of the 1900’s, will you be able to feel good about your generosity?

What will your legacy mean to those who come after you? Will they see your successes but also your sacrifices? Will they see your good life, but also that you made the good life happen for others? Will they see that you loved your family, but also you put God first? I’d like to imagine that those who come after us to Peace Presbyterian Church would be inspired by the foundation of generosity they see laid by those who built that sanctuary out there. I like them to know that we did not have everything we wanted in our personal homes and that we resisted the temptation of bigger barns and bigger bank accounts because we wanted to build a house for God. I’d like to think that they will be looking back at us, seeing a church that built a sanctuary, but not a cathedral, because we wanted to make sure we were glorifying God as much with ministry and our mission, as with our architecture. **Maya Angelou said, “Your legacy is every life you’ve touched.”** When the Barnhardt brothers took over a small business, they set incomes for themselves that would enable their families to live a modest middle class lifestyle and agreed that anything the company made beyond that would be given to ministry, particularly ministries in the developing world. In their first year they were able to give away \$50,000; in the second year \$150,000; and by 2005 they were giving away \$1 million a month. They have also placed 99% ownership of the company into a trust that will ensure that when they have departed, all proceeds from the firm will continue to be invested in ministry. Inspired by the teaching of Jesus on wealth, these families established a legacy that would shape the future for many people, beyond their own family. What is your legacy?