

Sermon Title: Enough!
Text: Luke 12:13-21
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Most of us learn the value of money early in life. There is the story of a four year old girl who was a flower girl at her aunt's wedding. The wedding party was standing at the altar and the minister got to the part of the service where he asked the bride if she would take the groom for richer or poorer. The little girl piped up in a loud whisper that everyone in the congregation could hear: "Take richer, take richer!"

Given the choice, most of us would take richer. Isn't that the truth? In the story we are about to hear, Jesus addresses the appetite we all have for more.

Read Luke 12:13-21

There is always a context for the parables, the stories that Jesus' tells. The context for this particular parable is a family dispute. Two brothers are at loggerheads over property and money. The relationship has broken down irrevocably and so one of the brothers comes to Jesus not asking for arbitration or mediation, but for a final judgment. For this brother, there will be a winner and a loser.

The brother was using Jesus as a blunt instrument. 'You Rabbi Jesus, you tell him what is right!' The relationship between the two brothers is already broken, but with the final judgment that is sought there will be a total separation between the two.

How often does this happen in families. Money, property, disputes over wills or family businesses cause strains, breaks and even total break-down of relationships.

Jesus refuses to become a judge between the two brothers; rather he becomes a judge over them. He does this by infuriating them with a story – a parable.

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop." (Luke 12:16)

Jesus starts to mess with people's heads straight away. The common belief then, as now, is that our wealth, our prosperity is a direct result of our wisdom, our hard work, our intelligence - that our life is what we make it. But this is what Jesus says: the ground of a certain rich man. The ground – the earth and elements – not the rich man's hard work or business acumen produces the bumper crop.

Jesus is saying that the ultimate and only source of the man's wealth is God who made the ground. This is a profound observation that totally messes with our tendency to pride and self-reliance. The rich man's surplus crops are unearned – they are a gift from God. And if they are a gift from God, in the end those same crops ultimately belong to God.

We live in one of the wealthiest countries on earth. We enjoy a standard of living unparalleled in history. By any measure we are wealthier than 99.9% of the rest of the world's population. Whether we were born in this country or we emigrated here it does not matter – the fact we live here and enjoy the incredible prosperity of this country is not ultimately due to our intelligence or hard work or any other factor except God has blessed us. We live immersed in the blessing of God.

When we understand that our wealth is a gift from God to be stewarded rather than treasure to be hoarded, our use of money and possessions profoundly changes.

The clear teaching of the Bible is that we do not own anything. Let me say that again; we do not own anything.

Despite what our bank accounts might add up to, or what property titles we hold or what our share portfolio or superannuation stack up to – all these things are gifts of God on loan to us. We get to choose how those gifts are used, but we do not in the end own them. We are stewards, not owners.

But many of us live the lie of ownership just like the rich man in Jesus' parable.

Seeing his bumper crop the rich man asks himself the question 'what shall I do with MY crops?' He does not see, nor acknowledge that the crops are in the end God's.

Now he has a storage problem. It never enters his mind that perhaps the crops are gifts from God to be given away. Saint Ambrose puts it beautifully this way:

The rich man has storage available in the mouths of the needy. (Saint Ambrose)

The rich man has a conversation with himself. This is a striking feature of Jesus' story. In Middle-Eastern culture, decisions were made communally and after long conversations with friends and family. But in Jesus' story the man is totally alone, mumbling to himself. Jesus seems to be pointing to the isolating loneliness that wealth often can bring. The man is lonely and friendless in the midst of his wealth.

After a conversation with himself he schemes to tear down his old barn, builds bigger ones and to sit back and enjoy the good life:

(I will) take life easy; eat, drink and be merry. (Luke 12:19)

Just as he is sitting back day-dreaming about his superannuated retirement, God's voice thunders him awake.

You fool!

There are four words for fool in ancient Greek. The one used here is 'aphron'. This is the harshest of the four words that Luke could use.

There is a bit of slapstick in all this seriousness.

God was saying to the man; 'You idiot; you numbskull, you dropkick!'

Are you a few sandwiches short of a picnic?

Are there some kangaroos loose in the top paddock?

Does the elevator not go all the way to the top floor?

Did you fall out of the stupid tree and hit every branch on the way down?

Were you hiding behind the door when I passed out brains?

You fool! You fool for labouring under the illusion this grain is yours to store, rather than a gift of God to steward.

God says to the man that this very night that he dreams of a comfortable, if lonely future his soul will be required of him. And here is the rub. The word translated as 'required of you' is the Greek word apiteo. It literally means to exact something that is due. It is a financial term used by lenders.

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God is saying to the man, 'The soul loaned to you needs to be paid back.... now. Right now.'

Effectively God is saying not only are the crops not yours to store, but your life is not yours to own. Your life, your soul, is on loan. As God speaks, the rich man is silent. God has the last word as he receives back the life he gave on loan to the man, who truly has become a very rich fool.

Jesus completes this devastating picture with these words:

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.
(Luke 12:21)

We do not own our goods or our soul.

The abundant life is found in 'treasuring up for God' not for self.

The very simply, Jesus' story presents us with a fundamental truth and a critical choice:

Fundamental Truth: This life (and all that comes with it) is a gift of God on loan to us.

Critical Choice: What will we do with this life (and all that comes with it)? Will we squander or steward it?

This fundamental truth and critical choice is what we will be focussing on over the next few weeks.

Let's shift gears for a moment.

Every human being is born with an appetite. At its most basic, we are born with an appetite for food. But we have other appetites – for comfort, for warmth for safety and so on. The Bible also teaches us that every human being is born with an even more profound appetite – an appetite for God.

Adam and Eve were created with an appetite for God. That appetite was met as they walked with God in the Garden of Eden. This idyllic story turns when Adam and Eve stop reaching for God to meet their appetite and instead reach out and eat the fruit of the tree.

Appetite is a God-given gift. There is nothing wrong with having an appetite; it is misplaced appetite that brings pain and sorrow.

Yearning itself is health... It's not the wanting that corrupts us. What corrupts us is the wanting that's misplaced, set on the wrong thing. (Mark Buchanan)

Ever since Adam and Eve's fateful choice we have been living in a culture of mine and more.

Rather than viewing the material gifts of God as goods to be stewarded, they have become possessions to own and store. With a death grip we hold on to our stuff and say, 'Mine!'

Rather than discovering satisfaction and contentment in the gifts God gives us, we are caught up in the soul-destroying struggle for 'more'.

We live in a culture of mine and more.

Think about it for a moment. What are two of the first words we learn as children? Mine and more! If you are in any doubt, just hang out at playgroup one morning!

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We learn the rules of ownership at a young age. For toddlers:

If I like it, it's mine.
If it's in my hands, it's mine.
If I can take it from you, it's mine.
If I had it a week ago, it's mine.
If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
If it looks like mine, it's mine.
If I think it's mine, it's mine.
If it's near me, it's mine.
If it's broccoli, it's yours.

This sense of ownership breeds a feeling of entitlement in us. The word owes us. God owes us. Our boss owes us. Our family owes us.

Your kids, like mine, may well have written letters to Santa. You may have written to Santa. One kid, Alfred, wrote this letter:

"Dear Santa, you did not bring me anything good last year. You did not bring me anything good the year before that. This is your last chance. Signed, Alfred."

Many of us grow up with a sense of entitlement. Many of us have the same attitude to God that Alfred has to Santa. God owes us. God owes us more. And God is perhaps on his last chance because God hasn't come through.

We live in a culture of mine and more.

In the film 'Over the Hedge', RJ is a street-smart raccoon who is trying to convince his new friends that suburb-dwelling humans are the key to gathering all the food they could ever need. Let's watch as RJ builds his case:

Play 'Over the Hedge' scene

The Wisdom of the Raccoon: 'With humans, enough is never enough!'

'Mine' is not enough; we need more. In seeking to meet our appetite in the wrong places, we just get more and more spiritually frustrated and hungry. King Solomon, a man of incredible wealth and power, wrote these haunting words:

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.
(Ecclesiastes 5:10)

For many of us enough is never enough. 'Mine' is not enough; we need more.

And so our community is divided between those who know spiritual contentment and those despairing in spiritual frustration. It's a bit like the difference between cats and dogs. In one of John Ortberg's books he records excerpts from the daily diaries of a dog and a cat from the same household.

First let me read the dog's diary:

Day number 181
8:00 am - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
9:40 am - OH BOY! A WALK! MY FAVORITE!

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10:30 am - OH BOY! A CAR RIDE! MY FAVORITE!
11:30 am - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!
1:00 pm - OH BOY! THE YARD! MY FAVORITE!
4:00 pm - OH BOY! THE KIDS! MY FAVORITE!
5:00 PM - OH BOY! DOG FOOD! MY FAVORITE!

It is a picture of contentment isn't it?

Now let's read from the cat's diary:

DAY 752 of my captivity - My captors continue to taunt me with bizarre little dangling objects. They dine lavishly on fresh meat, while I am forced to eat dry cereal. The only thing that keeps me going is the hope of escape, and the mild satisfaction I get from ruining the occasional piece of furniture. Tomorrow I may eat another pot-plant.

DAY 765 of my imprisonment - Decapitated a mouse and brought them the headless body in an attempt to make them aware of what I am capable of, and to try to strike fear into their hearts. They only cooed and condescended about what a good little cat I was. The plan is not working.

The Western world is divided between those the spiritually content and the spiritually frustrated.

And here's the thing; we will never, ever meet our spiritual needs or satisfy our spiritual appetite with material things – with money and stuff.

This is the paradox of our 21st century Western World. We are rich beyond compare – we have more stuff, a superior standard of living, bigger houses and amazing technology and yet more people than ever live lives of deep frustration and even despair.

American comedian, Louis C.K has said:

We live in a world where everything is amazing and nobody is happy. (Louis C.K)

It seems to be human nature to focus on what we do not have rather than celebrate that which we already enjoy.

Recently there was a study of Olympic medalists. Incredibly it was discovered that bronze medalists were quantifiably happier than silver medalists. Here's why: Silver medalists tended to focus on how close they came to winning gold, so they weren't satisfied with silver; bronze medalists tended to focus on how close they came to not winning medal at all, so they were just as happy to be on the medal stand.

Many of us are always reaching, grasping, striving – but are never really satisfied.

Enough never seems to be enough.

What we have failed to realize is that contentment is not related to our bank account or house size or holiday experiences. Contentment is discovered not in stuff and experiences, but only in God.

The Apostle Paul tells the church at Philippi that he has discovered the secret of contentment.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Philippians 4:12)

Born into wealth, Paul also knew hunger bordering on starvation. And yet here he says the contentment he knew was not a product of his material wealth. He goes on to say:

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I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

For Paul, true contentment was found in and through his relationship with Jesus Christ who strengthened him. His appetite was satisfied in his living and vital relationship with God.

Our treasure is not in our barns full of grain, but in the richness of our relationship with God and with each other.

Martin Buber tells the story of the Rabbi of Krakow – Rabbi Eisik.

One night Rabbi Eisik had a very clear and memorable dream. In this dream someone came to him and told him of a great treasure. He instructed the Rabbi to look for this treasure in the city of Prague, under the bridge, which led to the king's palace. At first Rabbi Eisik thought very little of the dream. When this dream occurred not once, but two more times, the Rabbi decided to go to Prague.

Upon arriving at the bridge Rabbi Eisik noticed that it was guarded day and night and that he dare not attempt to do any digging. Instead, he went to the bridge every morning and kept walking around it until evening. After several days of doing this the Captain of the Guard finally approached him. In a very kindly manner he asked the Rabbi whether he was looking for something. Without telling him his name or where he was from, Rabbi Eisik responded truthfully by telling the Captain about the dream that had brought him so far.

At this point the Captain of the Guard only laughed, stating, “And so you wore out your shoes to come here! Heck, if I thought that dreams were all that trustworthy I should have got going a long time ago. You see I once had a dream in which I was told to go to Krakow. I was told to go dig for treasure under the stove in the room of a Jew, of all things! Yes, Eisik, that was his name! Now can you imagine that? I would have to go to every house in Krakow, where half of the Jews are named Eisik!”

The Captain of the Guard once again let out a huge laugh. Rabbi Eisik simply bowed, traveled home, and dug up the treasure from under the stove.

In our culture of more and mine, where enough is never enough – so many of us look for treasure where we will never find it. Over here, enough is never enough. But there is treasure to be found...

Brennan Manning has said that the real difference between people is between the aware and the unaware.

You see, as much as we are striving after and seeking God, God even more so is striving after and seeking us.

And while we look for God in all the wrong places, while we seek to satisfy our spiritual appetite with all the wrong food, God is offering us always all the food that we need.

When seek to satisfy our spiritual hunger with more and more stuff we will find enough is never enough.

But with the treasure that God offers, enough is always is enough.

Jesus cry on the cross, ‘It is finished!’ can become through faith in him our cry too. ‘It is finished’, all our striving and struggling for treasure that will not satisfy our soul or sate our spiritual hunger. No more – because with God enough is always enough.

So are you aware or unaware?

Are you content or are you frustrated?

Here Paul's words to the Ephesians:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:18-20)

Is God's enough for you?