

“Good to Grow”

“Treasures of the Heart”

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Luke 12: 13-21

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When I was living out west, there was a great billboard on the highway between the two churches on my Pastoral Charge, Claresholm and Stavely, Alberta. It was the picture of a big, classy-looking combine harvesting a wheat field.



It's the New Holland CR10.90. I think it has solar panels on the top. And I remember the slogan: *“You're going to want a bigger farm.”*

I loved that billboard. I remember thinking how awesome it would be to see that billboard on the Gardiner

Expressway in downtown Toronto! I also thought it was a brilliant piece of advertising. That simple slogan: “You're going to want a bigger farm” just said so much. It said ‘Buy’ this piece of machinery and your seeding and harvest will be so effortless and so relaxing and so quick that you're going to want more work. Your experience working that machine is going to be so absolutely amazing that you're going to want an excuse to spend more time and three quarters more hours in your beloved new combine. With this purchase, your farm is going to start to feel too small.’

While out west, I would sometimes do pastoral visits in a combine! Many of my congregation members put in very long hours of harvesting at this time of the year. They are incredibly expensive machines. I remember one farmer saying to me, “Do you know why they put two seats in the harvester?” I shrugged my shoulders and he said, “The other one is for the banker!”

Having more is always so appealing; whether it is more land or more money in the bank. There is pleasure in more, there is power in more and most of all there is security in more.

In our gospel lesson this morning, a man comes to Jesus and asks Jesus to tell his brother to give him a share of the family inheritance. However, Jesus refuses to be the judge over this ethical issue. Instead of judging his brother, Jesus cautions the man who came to him and his brother and the crowd gathered to listen and... each one of us here. *“Take*

care!” he tells us. *“Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”* It is not just the brother who wouldn’t give away the inheritance who was greedy, but also the one who came to Jesus, and frankly, most of us.

Jesus tells a parable about a rich fool. I want to point out that the rich man in the parable was not dishonest, he simply happened to become wealthy through hard work and through the blessings of rich soil, gentle rain, warm sun and good seed. The harvest was so good he didn’t have enough room to store all of it, so he built bigger barns. Perhaps the man found some power or pleasure in the very abundant harvest, but more than that — he found security. He knew that now he had enough, and he smugly paraphrases Ecclesiastes 9:7, saying that now he can *“Eat, drink and be merry!”* Basically he says: ‘I’ve made it, now I can relax!’ There is no indication that this man was in any way immoral. In fact, he seems just the opposite: careful and conservative. Frankly we might see him as a model farmer ... if it were not for the fact that Jesus calls him a fool.

Why is he a fool? Partly because he believed that now all was well — that he had it all put together — when in fact he was to die that night, and never enjoy the fruit of his labour. But the bigger reason that he is a fool is because he put his security and identity in possessions and wealth, and not in God.

Last weekend I spent Thanksgiving at a cottage up at a camp called Gracefield.



It’s a beautiful camp and a lovely little cottage on the lake (Lac du Castor). The cottage has a great big fireplace and that is the primary heat source. It was a cool weekend and the cottage was freezing when we arrived, so the first thing we did was get a fire going. It took a few hours for the fire to really start heating the place, but there is nothing quite like a wood fire to keep you warm. That kind of heat just wraps around you. We

kept the fire going pretty much all weekend. After a while the cottage was not just warm but hot.

There's only so much you can do to adjust the temperature — you can let the fire die down a little but we didn't want it to go out, so we were always tending and tinkering with the fire. At a certain point we opened a couple of windows a crack to moderate the temperature.

I remember thinking this was incredibly wasteful — almost scandalous. Heat is so expensive these days ... you don't want to waste it. Except that here the heat was not expensive. Gracefield sits on 500 acres of treed property. Every year, especially in the spring, they have work weekends to get ready for camp and one of the biggest jobs is chain-sawing trees that have fallen down on the roads or near the buildings. They have so much wood it's not funny. There is a huge pile of wood near that cottage and the director at one point said: "Burn as much as you want!"

Why am I telling you this? One morning during a quiet devotional time I felt God telling me that this cabin with a blazing fire in the fireplace is what his love is like. It is so warm and enveloping and rich that you will want to open the windows and let some of it out. When you let Jesus into your life, when you open yourself to the love of God — you will find such abundance that everything else will seem insignificant in comparison.

I was grateful last weekend to catch a glimpse of that incredible love of God in that cottage. It's always there and available, but all of us, me included, fight a constant battle against our fears and worries and our desires for cool stuff and great experiences. There is a small verse in the Parable of the Sower that I often think of.



The Parable of the Sower is the one that Jesus tells comparing people hearing and receiving the word of God to seed that is scattered and sown: some of the seed falls on rocky soil, and some of it falls among the thorns and some of it lands in good soil that produces an abundant crop. The verse is Mark 4:18-19. "Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

1. Worries of this life
2. Deceitfulness of wealth
3. Desire for other things.

I don't know about you, but I am 3 for 3: I worry too much, I find myself thinking often "If we just had a little bit more money things would be

better, less stressful"... and I just plain want nice things and great experiences.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying life and enjoying and being grateful for our things, but when we cling to them, when we focus on them and think that they will solve our problems; then it's a problem. When we use things to fill emptiness inside we end up blocking the incredible heat and power of the love of God that really does fill us and heal us.

Please don't give to the church because it's a great cause. It *is* a great cause. I do believe this church does an enormous amount of good. The letter that I sent out to you last week focused on all the good that this church is doing for individuals and for the community as a whole.

But I speak to you now as someone who believes in the saving power of God's love: a power that heals, that strengthens, that gives peace and hope in incredibly hard and difficult times and abundant life and wants nothing more than for you to experience the warmth of God's love — don't give because of the cause — give because giving is a gateway to receiving that love.

Let me be clear: this is not about buying God's love. You can't. There are stories in the Bible where people try to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit, and it doesn't go well. What I am saying is that as Christians we are not called to give because the church is doing good things this year, or the minister is nice, or because 'will that roof ever get fixed??' Don't give because you are such lovely and generous people — those things might well be true, but it's not why we give. As a follower of Jesus, our primary reason for giving is an act of faith.

Make a commitment to give — and it really should be a prayerful commitment where you ask God "What are you calling me to give to you and your work?" Instead of giving out of what we have left — I call that generous giving — the Bible calls us to make a commitment to giving from what we first were given. We are to give our "first fruits". It's a commitment off the top instead of off what is left. The Biblical amount was 10% -- that's what a tithe is —10%. We are not legalistic here, and I think what is more important than giving 10% is praying about it and making a commitment to God. Maybe it will be 5% of what you earn and receive, or 15%. In the Bible, in the history of the church, the Tithe was the commitment, and the offering was the extra. The offering was what you gave when you were feeling generous or saw a special need, but it was above and beyond the commitment that had been made to God.

When you make a commitment to give, you are saying to God: "*You are my God! Not that nice car, not my bank account or a sense of financial*

security. You are my security. Lord, all of this stuff is temporary and you are eternal. I choose you. You are my treasure.”

You know, it's not just individuals who are called to live and give that way, but the church is too. We struggle to meet budgets and every other day it seems that something breaks around this church that costs money to fix. It's almost comical — if it's not the kitchen taps it's the busted door or water heater. It's easy for us as a church to start worrying and focusing on problems and to fixate on donations. But it's a trap. This church belongs to God, not to us. If the Lord wants this ministry to continue he will provide ... and we have to put our faith in God and not on donations. And so we continue to give freely the good news of Jesus, and meals and hospitality because the Lord has given so much to us. We as a church need to commit to giving from what God has given to us.

Matthew 6: 25, 26

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” “Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Where is your treasure?

It is always a frightening and risky feeling to let go of our earthly treasures and security blankets. Giving as commitment and as an act of faith is scary at first — we are so used to worrying and to putting our hope in things like the stock market, but let me tell you it is incredibly liberating and freeing, and you will experience the treasure that God longs to place in your heart.

The security that you will find in following Jesus is so much greater than the security of a full barn or bank account. Jesus can set you free. And when the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

You are not guaranteed material wealth when you follow Jesus. Some of his followers are very wealthy but most are not. I can guarantee that you will feel less fearful and easier about money. You will feel free. You will see more clearly where God has provided and how you have enough. You will see beautiful abundance all around you. Enough to fully live and enough to open the windows of your heart to share the treasure of the love of God with others.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

