

## Generosity and Jesus

Luke 12:13-21 and Luke 21:1-4

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

September 21, 2025

Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

There was a man who worked hard. And as far as he was concerned, his hard work was worth it. After all, he had climbed the corporate ladder. He had the title he always dreamt of. Sure, he worked long hours. Sure, he missed family events now and then. But in the end it was all worth the sacrifice. After all, he made good money and with that money he had purchased a large home and he always provided the best vacations for his family.

One summer they packed their bags and boarded the plane and took off for a tropical island. Two weeks of relaxation lay ahead of them. And they soaked it all in. The man did everything he could think of. He snorkeled. He went parasailing. He scuba dived.

One day, around lunch time he was walking along the beach. He saw a local man who had been fishing but was packing up his things. "Time for a lunch break?" he asked. "No, I'm done for the day," the fisherman said. "Done for the day? Already?!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I've caught enough fish to sell so my family can have dinner tonight. I am heading home," replied the fisherman.

The vacationing man had not felt his blood pressure this high since he left the office days ago. What was this man saying?!?

He turned to him and said, "But, if you worked longer and caught more fish you would have more than enough money for today. You could save money. You could invest money. Retirement will be here before you know it. At the rate you are going, you won't ever be able to retire. What are you thinking?!?!"

The local fisherman, unbothered by the business man's stress, simply said, "I'm not worried about retirement. I am living my best life right now. See you later. I'm headed home to have lunch with my spouse and to play with my children." With that, he gathered up his day's catch and walked on down the beach.

This story always comes to mind when I hear the parable that Jesus told in our first reading.

And yet, the parable is about far more than just the fact that we can't take it with us, that you don't see a hearse with a U-Haul.

The parable, although it *does* critique our excess accumulation, is about far more than that.

The parable, although it *does* critique the values with which we live, especially in connection with money, is about more than that.

As New Testament professor Matt Skinner writes, "The parable digs deeper, toward the heart. It tells about money's ability to impoverish your soul and rewire your values. The way the parable is explicitly framed makes it warn against greed...and egotistical preoccupation with one's own security." Skinner goes on writing, "What exactly does this parable explain? That greed is idolatry" (Matt Skinner, Working Preacher, [Poor Fool - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

In other words, money and the stuff it buys, lure us into misplaced reverence, worship, and trust.

Money lures us into thinking that we have to do things ourselves and that it is shameful to lean on others or to ask for help.

Money lures us into thinking we are independent.

Money lures us into thinking we are self-made.

Did you hear this in the parable? See it wasn't only about the fact that the man had so much. *Yes, that is actually far more problematic than we like to acknowledge.* But, don't miss the fact that while he had barns full of stuff, it seems he had no significant relationships around him.

Let's be honest. This man wasn't harvesting his crops and building his barns on his own. He likely had a family. He certainly, at his level of wealth, had servants. But none of them are mentioned. Rather, even when he has conversation, he has it with himself and himself alone.

And that is at the heart of the issue in this parable. That is at the heart of the rewiring of values that Professor Skinner talks about.

When money and the things we possess make our world smaller, when they cause us to focus only on ourselves or a few select and close members of our household or inner circle, when we become so focused on what we have and what we save and what we keep that we forget our connection to the world, then we have lost the foundation of our faith, a foundation built on love and compassion, justice and mercy, and the knowledge that we are not alone, but that our life is connected and interdependent with the lives of our neighbors.

Jesus talks about money. He actually talks about money a lot. And while it is about money, it isn't *just* about money. At the heart of it is the way money so often reshapes us toward self and away from community, toward suspicion and away from trust.

And remember, we didn't only read the parable of the man who had to build bigger barns to contain all his stuff. We also heard the story of the widow who gave two small copper coins.

The widow...she knew what it was to be dependent. She knew what it was to trust her community and to trust her God. She knew what it was to have enough. She even knew what it was to have too little, which likely helped her appreciate what enough truly was. And even in the midst of what most of us would identify as her poverty, she chose to share. Because even two little copper coins...everything she had...felt like more than she needed.

We pray, as we did today, give us this day our daily bread. But do we mean it?

I'm not sure there has ever been a time when I actually had to pray for that day's bread. And so we spiritualize this rather than acknowledging our excess. We pray this prayer of the faith, saying the words but too often missing the point. We find our security in the economy of the world even as Jesus works to invite us into an economy of community and trust.

Friends, let's acknowledge it...this is hard stuff.

Money deals in an economy of fear and addiction, but it is where we live and where we are often comfortable.

Jesus deals in an economy of hope and interdependence.

Meanwhile, we want both. We don't know how to live without money. We generally don't even have imagination enough to capture that vision.

But we do have choices.

We can allow ourselves to be rewired and to let money have a hold on us. We can allow ourselves to hear Jesus' words and only apply them to those who are richer than us.

Or we can choose community, compassion, and trust. We can make a commitment to stay in the struggle, ask the hard questions, to even go against the grain. We can be willing to sit in this conversation even though it is uncomfortable.

It isn't easy. And the point, even though we sometimes do, is not to make us feel guilty about what we have. Rather it is to empower us to remember who we are and whose we are, to shape our lives accordingly, and to live in the generous ways of Jesus. Amen.