

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Thanksgiving Eve  
November 24, 2021  
Luke 12:13-21

Life - Possessed, Not Possessing

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15 ESV)

Dearly Beloved,

We are constantly bombarded with ads promoting this or that in an attempt to arouse covetousness in us. Those ads often imply, if they don't outright say it, that our lives would be better if we had what they're selling, and poorer if we don't. If the advertisers are successful, we will buy their product – whether we need it or not, and, often, whether we can afford it or not.

It is in such a materialistic environment that we have gathered in God's House to give Him thanks for His bountiful gifts to us. And "bountiful" is the right word. For as we confess in the explanation of the First Article of the Creed, He is not stingy in doling out His blessings to us. [page 322] "He has given me my body and soul" and everything that entails, and He still takes care of them. Think of it. God created you and He still looks after you - body and soul. God has not left you to fend for yourself. Instead, He takes care of you and provides all that you need to support this body and life. If you look over that list of blessings under the First Article, you'll see how true it is that "He richly and daily provides [you]" with all that you need.

What often gets lost, however, is the blessing that "He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil." That is certainly no small matter. As you are surrounded by temptation to covetousness, it is comforting to know that God Himself watches over you and provides all you need, including protection from sin and all that would harm you.

The problem is that we are a covetous people. We generally aren't satisfied with what God has given us. We want a different body, a firmer body, a healthier body. We want newer stuff, better stuff, more enjoyable stuff, or maybe even just \*more\* stuff. We think if we get what we want, whatever it is, then we'll be happy and content. And the reason that's a problem is that we start to trust in those possessions for our security. The things become the most important thing in our lives. Likewise, we often think of these things as ours and that what we have is the result of our labor or that we deserve them. When such is the case, our possessions begin to possess us. And that is quite dangerous for us.

To illustrate His point that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses," Jesus told the parable of the rich man whose ground produced a bumper crop.

What a blessing this man received! But all was not well. This man didn't see that all that he had was a gift from God. Yes, he had an "I" problem. All of his attention was focused on himself. Notice all the first-person language, that is, "I, me, and my" talk. My crops. My barns. My goods. "What shall I do?" "This is what I'll do." I'll do this. I'll do that. He was turned totally in on himself. He was the center, indeed the totality, of his life.

In truth, this man wasn't so much possessive of his possessions as he was possessed by them. He thought his life consisted of his wealth and possessions. They had become his god. He trusted in his possessions for his security. With this sudden windfall, he's ready to kick back and "eat, drink, and be merry." Now that he had enough to take care of him, he was going to take it easy and live the good life. He didn't have a care in the world because he had everything he needed. Or so he thought. He didn't realize that his life did "not consist in the abundance of what he possessed."

That's why God calls him a fool. He was. He trusted in his possessions for security. But God had other plans. "This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" As the man-made plans for the future, he had forgotten about one of the two sure things in life. He hadn't taken the possibility of his death to heart. He didn't understand what James would later write:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"- 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:13-17)

And doesn't that happen today as well? Don't many of us live as though we will be around for a long time? Well, some of us may not, and yet, none of us knows when we will be taken from this world. And when it does happen, someone else gets all our stuff. Even Solomon, with all his wealth, realized that when he died, someone else would get it. "And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?" It all seemed so useless and meaningless.

So what's the alternative? If we don't want to end up like the man in the parable, what are we to do? Of what does true life consist? Well, my dear friends, true life consists in being possessed by God. That's how one becomes and remains "rich toward God." And that life began for you when Jesus came into the world to be your Savior. He gave up His riches in heaven to come to earth. He became poor so that you could become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). He died on the cross so your sins would be forgiven. And when faith was created in you in your Baptism, you became God's child, one "who pleases Him." Your life is found in Christ "for in Him [you] live and move and have [your] being" (Acts 17:28). Yes, God has given you life in and through Christ. Thus He also gives you "wisdom, knowledge, and happiness" as Solomon says. He gives you food and drink and satisfaction in your work. Indeed, such satisfaction comes only from God as you realize more and more what He has done for you in Christ. And as you "set [your] heart on

things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" and as you "set [your] mind on things above [and] not on earthly things," you find true joy. When you realize more and more that your true treasure is in heaven, your heart will be there too.

Your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions, but rather in being possessed by God. Thus, Paul told Timothy:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

And that's exactly what St. Paul commended the Corinthians for doing. He encouraged them to use the blessings God had given them to provide help for the church in Jerusalem. Not only would they use those gifts to thank God, but by their gifts others would praise and thank God too:

Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. . . . 11 You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:7-8, 11).

Dearly Beloved, God has blessed you beyond measure – not only in material possessions, but especially in spiritual. Your inheritance is certain. You have a heavenly home waiting for you. Your life is in Christ. Therefore use your possessions to thank God and help your neighbor. After all, they will be passed on or burned up. Yet, by God's grace, you shall live. When God requires your soul, you will not hear "You Fool," but rather "Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Thus it is with those who are rich toward Him, those who are possessed by Him. "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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