

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – August 4, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 12:13-21 (NIV 84)

21) "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus;

Back in the year 1606 a group of 105 adventurers set out from England to sail to Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown would become the first permanent English colony in America, but these 105 men and boys had no thought about staying in Jamestown for very long. They had been sent there by the Virginia Company whose goal was to get rich fast by exporting wilderness products such as precious metals and furs and medicinals; like sassafras. The company was looking for a sevenfold return on the shareholders investment. These men hoped to make their money and go back to England. So even though the women were the ones who were skilled as the cooks, the gardeners and the healers in England – the 105 men and boys left the women behind -- believing they would not be needed.

It didn't take long before the colonists longed for wives and families. They grew hungry and wanted women to cook for them. They were lonely and wanted women to comfort them. They were overworked and needed children to help them grow tobacco. Just eight months later, only 38 of the original 105 adventurers were still alive. The others had succumbed to hunger and disease.

In retrospect we can see just how short-sighted the Virginia Company really was, can't we? Their goal was storing up earthly treasures and they were willing to risk life and limb to do it with the hope that they would be able to look forward to a life of ease and pleasure. Things may or may not have been that different if woman had been part of the original group of settlers but it is worth pointing out that in their quest for instant riches they ignored what God had said about man's need for a suitable companion and helper.

The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness and yes even "get rich schemes," are still a part of the American way of life. Now while life, liberty, happiness and even riches are all good gifts from our gracious God in heaven – our creator does not intend these things to be our chief pursuit. Our text for today speaks of the folly of being short-sighted in regard to our goals in this life.

Theme: Don't be Short-Sighted

1. Don't just look for ways to store up earthly treasures
2. Don't just look forward to a life of ease and pleasure
3. Look to God and his eternal plans for you

A crowd of many thousands had gathered around Jesus – earlier in this chapter Luke reported that they were trampling on one another. Someone in this large crowd said to Jesus: "**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.**"

It would appear that, as so often happens, a quarrel had developed between these two individuals over their father's estate. **14) Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15) Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."** Jesus was not willing to get caught in the middle of this family situation. But since Jesus could see the greed that was behind this argument he did take advantage of the situation to point out the foolishness of greed. He told a story which anyone of us could easily understand as a warning to all that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Jesus told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17) He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18) "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

What a success story! No doubt the man had worked long and hard hours toiling in the hot sun. And now the reward of his work – a bumper crop! But here's the dilemma. He has no place to store his crops. The solution, more hard work! Tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store his harvest.

Perhaps if Jesus were telling this story to city folk he might have told about a certain businessman whose sales were so good that he couldn't keep up with them. So what should he do? He'd just have to work harder. Maybe he'd build a bigger factory, hire more workers, and work longer hours so he could meet demands.

I'm guessing that in one way or another we've all gotten caught up in that kind of thinking. We expect our hard work to pay dividends. We're willing to take risks and to even do without in the hopes of making a fortune. Someone estimated that if you added up all the hours you spent on the various activities in your life that out of 70 years, you'd spend six years getting an education and another 14 years working. That's almost a third of our time spent storing up earthly treasures.

I think we can see how easy it is for us to become obsessed with these things – always chasing after something a bit bigger, a bit newer, a bit better and never quite being satisfied. Now what's the solution to this greed (which God calls a sin -- by the way)?

Well first of all let's point out that the Lord expects us to work to earn a living – the apostle Paul condemned the Thessalonians for their lack of work saying: (2 Thessalonians 3:10) **For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."**

But it's important to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving and to work *trusting that the Lord will provide*. All too often it is our sinful worry and lack of trust which drives us to look for ways to store up earthly treasures. As we'll see more clearly as we continue to examine Jesus' parable just storing up earthly treasure is being a bit short-sighted.

I don't think I'd have a hard time convincing anyone that all work and no play isn't a good thing. That same person who spent 20 of his 70 years getting an education would spend about 8 years relaxing, 6 years eating, 5 years riding in a car, 4 years talking, 3 years reading and 24 years sleeping.

When we work we work hard. When we play, we play even harder. Do you remember the bumper stickers which proclaimed, "The One with the Most Toys Wins." That pretty well sums up the philosophy of many including the farmer in Jesus' parable. After all of his hard work he was looking ahead to a life of ease and pleasure.

I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

This man would be the envy of many who long for the day when they can retire and enjoy a life of ease, traveling, golfing, fishing or whatever it is that brings them pleasure. Now don't get me wrong – rest and leisure time are gifts from God. There's nothing wrong with enjoying our leisure time, there's nothing wrong with looking ahead to a retirement. There's nothing wrong with fishing or golf. The problem is in just looking forward to a life of ease and pleasure without taking into consideration the Lord's plans for our life.

As we go about our lives it's amazingly easy for us to let greed get in the way of God. Remember the 70 year old who spent 20 years going to school and working so he could store up treasures so he could enjoy his 50 years of leisure. There was something missing from his list of activities. How many years did he spend as "God time"? You know praying, worshipping, reading the scriptures? Well let's assume he went to church every week; that he prayed for 5 minutes every morning and spent fifteen minutes every evening reading his Bible. How much time would that come to? About 16 months out of 70 years!

Put it another way and I think you'll see the folly and the short sightedness of just looking forward to a life of ease and pleasure in this world. The same person who spends 20 years preparing to enjoy 50 years of leisure in this world would only spend less than 1 ½ years preparing for eternity!

One of *Aesop's Fables* tells of a dog who stole a piece of meat from the butcher shop. He was running along when he came to a stream and what did he see? Another dog --with an even bigger piece of meat -- in his mouth! (It was his reflection.) So he opened his mouth to growl in an effort to get the bigger piece of meat and ended up with nothing -- losing even what he had.

Reminds us of the ending to Jesus' parable doesn't it? **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'** The rich man had not reckoned with God and his judgment. Far from being wise and resourceful this man was an utter fool because he was ill prepared when God's summons came. For the sake of earthly gain he had forfeited his life. He had completely ignored God in his planning.

God called him a fool -- one who was ignorant of what the real situation was. He thought his possessions had assured him of a life of ease and pleasure for years to come. However that was not to be. The very night in which he had laid all his plans for the future was his last night. This was the limit God had set on his life. All of the preparations he had made for his life in this world were useless. All the riches he had acquired would be used by others. And since he had put off making preparations for eternity; now he faced God's judgment with no spiritual resources. Dying as an unbeliever he faced an eternity of punishment.

Jesus drives home the point of his story to us when he says: **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."** Jesus warns all of us that the rich fool of his parable will not be the only one in hell. His same mistake will lead many others to their soul's destruction. Anyone who sets his heart just on getting the treasures of this life and just on enjoying a life of ease and pleasure in this world will begin to consider those treasures and pleasures as the most important thing in life. They take God's place. The gifts become more important than the giver. He's rejected the one who can give more than earthly blessings. He's rejected the one who could provide eternal blessings.

Jesus was not condemning riches; he is rather condemning a wrong attitude toward riches -- regarding them as if they are the most important thing in life. He warns against greed and the failure to use riches properly. He encourages us to look to God and his eternal plans by being rich toward God.

Being rich toward God is really a response to God's richness to us. God saw the poverty of our sinful condition and sent his Son to rescue us from our poverty so we might enjoy the riches of eternal life. Through faith in Christ Jesus the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is ours. Therefore we live not for ourselves but for him who gave his life for us.

To be sure we will work hard to provide food and clothing for ourselves and our families -- but we don't have to fret and worry whether or not we'll be able to store up enough for the future. We can leave the future in the Lord's hand. As we plan, we do so with the prayer that the Lord will bless those plans in keeping with his will. Our goal isn't earthly treasure and a life of ease and pleasure on this earth but serving our Lord for time

and eternity. While enjoying the pleasures the Lord grants us in this life we look ahead to the eternal treasures of heaven which will never rust, spoil or fade away. When the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation is our heart's desire --- these gifts which are ours for Christ's sake will become an everlasting treasure which can never be taken away from us.

Remember the person who spent his 70 years getting an education and earning a living and then enjoying his leisure – it's possible for a person to do all of that to the glory of God by seeking God's will and blessing each step of the way by living his life with trust in the Lord and with thanksgiving to the Lord in his heart. May God enable us to confidently look beyond life in this world; even as we give glory to him, while we wait for him to call us to enjoy his gift of eternal life. Amen.