

## August 7, 2022

### Sermon Manuscript

#### Luke 12:13-31 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

<sup>14</sup> Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” <sup>15</sup> Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

<sup>16</sup> And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. <sup>17</sup> He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

<sup>18</sup> “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. <sup>19</sup> And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

<sup>20</sup> “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?’

<sup>21</sup> “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

<sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

<sup>27</sup> “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

#### Country Dog or Caged Christianity? (Luke 12:13-31)

This morning I want to share the good news that whenever we feel challenged by God’s word, rather than seek to justify ourselves or make promises to be better, Jesus prefers to help us identify what we really want so He can address that desire with His good news.

These days, I’ve been continuing to learn a lot from Matt Tebbe & Ben Sternke of Gravity Leadership, who are also Anglican priests. And this morning want to share what Matt has said about two different dogs he has had the privilege of being around at different points in his life. One dog named Ivy and another dog named Buzz - Ivy & Buzz.

Ivy was a dog that Matt & his wife owned earlier in their marriage, before they had children, when they were living in the suburbs. She was a very nervous dog, and because both of them worked full time, they would have to coax Ivy into a crate each morning before they went to work, where she would be cooped up 8-9 hours a day. And when they’d come home Ivy would be so excited she’d pee on the floor. And when they’d take her for a walk Ivy’d be pulling so hard on the leash it was hard to keep up.

But in contrast to Ivy, the suburban dog, Matt described a country dog named Buzz. Buzz was a dog on the farm where Matt’s dad grew up. One day Buzz had just shown up and Matt’s dad began feeding him. There were no fences, no leashes, no collars; and he even took on a job of guarding the chicken coop from foxes & wolves. Buzz could go anywhere he wanted *and did*, sometimes getting into trouble - such as one time when he came back with porcupine quills in his nose. But Buzz chose to stay near Matt’s dad and make the farm his home.

Well, Matt describes the contrast between these two dogs, because he suggests that the life God prefers that we have with Him is like that of Buzz, the country dog. However, the way most of us tend to live as Christians is instead more like Ivy: (perhaps a bit nervous around God, but) rarely able to truly enjoy life of the kingdom with God, because we have these desires for other things which we are so busy

trying to manage, and attempting to curb our longing to run out beyond the good path the Lord has laid for us.

And this caged, suburban dog approach to Christianity is perhaps no more evident than when we encounter scriptures that confront our sin. I'm not sure if y'all noticed, but our scriptures today were doing a lot of that. In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon is speaking from experience about the futility (and emptiness) of a life centered upon running after pleasure & riches; Psalm 49 also highlights the folly of trusting in material wealth; in Colossians, St Paul exhorts us to forsake sexual immorality and to put away wrath and obscene language. I heard a minister from Matt & Ben's church preach on all of this who observed that *when* we encounter scriptures that confront our sin, our reflex is often to try to relieve that discomfort it causes as quickly as we can, and we usually do this by justifying ourselves - reassuring ourselves that we don't do these things or at least don't do them as badly as others - OR we try to relieve it beating ourselves up for our sin, swearing off the behavior, and promising to do better. But in truth, these responses are all like that of a caged dog approach Christianity, which fail to resolve our inner conflicts with our desires, rather than leading us to truly desire God's way and to enjoy the peace of a country-dog sorta life with God, like Buzz enjoyed with Matt's dad.

The good news, though, is that whenever we feel challenged by God's word, rather than seeking to justify ourselves or making promises to be better, Jesus prefers to help us identify what we really want - what the motivation is underneath that sin - so He can address that desire with His good news. Rather than trying to minimize our sin or constantly manage it, Jesus desires to help us identify for ourselves what we want (without judgment) and be honest with Him about it - because in our reality - that reality - is the only place God can really meet us anyway. So when Jesus would teach and use parables, this was often what he was trying to help people do: to become self-aware of what they really wanted, to see the true reality of how they were trying to fulfill it. And this is what Jesus is up to in our Luke passage after someone in the crowd says, "Teacher (Rabbi), tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Now, just to explain why someone in those days might make a request like this of Jesus: according to Jewish law, when an inheritance was received - like if the father of a family died - the firstborn son was not entitled to a double portion of the inheritance, but he also got to decide when the inheritance would be divided. So it would seem that this is a younger brother whose older brother has not yet divided the inheritance, causing him to feel unjustly treated. But because it was an issue of Jewish law - based in the scriptures - it was common that people would look to rabbis to settle such disputes. So this younger brother asks Jesus to help him claim his share, and Kenneth Bailey believes there has already been a rupture in the relationship over this, because rather than say "Rabbi, help my brother and I settle this disagreement we're in the middle of" he's asking Jesus to use his authority as a rabbi to force the older brother to divide the inheritance against his will.

But I wonder: who here among us *doesn't* wish they had more money? I would venture to guess that if most of us reflect on just the past week, we could identify some situation where that longing has come up. Or, we may not have to think back: we may feel it right now: 'I want more money than I have'. But my encouragement if we detect that longing is not to judge ourselves for it; rather, just to be curious about the belief that's underneath it.

In the case of this younger brother, there could be any number of reasons that he wants his brother to split that inheritance, including possibly some godly reasons. Perhaps he needs it in order to provide for his family; maybe he has more mouths under his roof than he's able to feed. Or perhaps he wants to use the inheritance to help others; I dunno, maybe he wants to use it to open a food bank. But it could also be that this younger brother doesn't so much *need* the inheritance as he just *wants to have it*, perhaps because he believes that the more wealth he accrues the better his life will be or perhaps he believes that it is up to him to secure himself rather than trusting God, that only *He* is looking out for him.

Well, Jesus wants to help him discern what belief is motivating his desire for more, and also what the implications are of acting on it. So rather than doing what this younger man wants him to, Jesus replies with a one-verse teaching and then tells a story. In verse 15, he says, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed (for) life does not consist in an abundance of possessions”, or “the true life my Father has for you is not found in the surplus of possessions.” And then Jesus tells a story - a parable - about a landowner whose fields yielded a bumper crop and had to decide what to do with the surplus.

Jesus said, “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. (And) he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’” Now, scholar Kenneth Bailey explains that right off this is already “a very sad scene”: In that culture people made decisions about important topics after long discussions with family and friends, but this man appears to have *no friends*. “With an important decision, the only person with whom he can dialogue is himself.”

But in verse 18 he decides, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.”<sup>19</sup> And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” So this man’s thought process reveals that he believes that life - that is the good life - comes in having an abundance of possessions & pleasure.<sup>1</sup> And he believes that all his material possessions are his - notice he says “what will i do with *my* crops?... I will tear down *my* barns... to store *my* grain”. He fails to recognize what scripture teaches that everything we have - both the days we’ve been given and our material possessions - are gifts from God and we will be accountable to Him for how we use it.<sup>2</sup> Of course, he quickly learns this, but after it's too late, as in verse 20 God says to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” And in verse 21, Jesus explains that “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”#

So in telling all of this to the younger brother, Jesus wants to help him identify his motives in seeking out a rabbie to force his brother to split the inheritance. Is it for godly reasons & a last resort or is he like the rich fool: believing a lie about the importance of material possessions, thinking only of himself, and willing to further damage his relationship with his brother for greed?

And Jesus also wants this first half of the passage to do the same thing for us in considering whether we’re living by bad news in regard to material wealth: to consider whether we’re believing the lie that the more we accrue the better our lives will be or the lie that we’re on our own to secure ourselves? Because living by either of those lies is going to be to the detriment of us and those we love. It’s going to affect how much we work, how we spend our time, the work we pursue, how we view retirement, in ways that will cause us to become more like that rich fool: perhaps rich in cash, but poor in relationships, ungenerous toward others, and blind to the vision and opportunities of the kingdom of God that the Lord wants to lead us into.

But whenever we feel challenged by God’s word, rather than seeking to justify ourselves or resolving to sin less, Jesus prefers to help us identify (the reality of) what we really want so He can address that desire with His good news. And that’s what Jesus does in what remains of today’s passage. He meets the bad news we may believe about money with this. In verse 22, he says,

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey notes that at the end of verse 19, he’s actually selectively quoting from Ecclesiastes, not the passage we read today, but chapter 8, which commends eating and drinking and being glad, but also acknowledges that everything we have - both our ability to earn and our time on earth - are gifts from God.

But the rich fool has no view of this.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey notes that apparently the rich fool had failed to read verse 2:18 from our Ecclesiastes passage today, “<sup>18</sup> I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

“(Truly) I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. **23** For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. **24** Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! **25** Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? **26** Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

Having used the parable to expose the reality of what this younger brother really wants in his desire for the inheritance, why he wants it, and the bad fruit it is likely to bear - and perhaps he's done that for us here as well, in regard to money - Jesus then meets that bad news with the Good News of God's care and concern for all of our needs. He invites us onto the path of viewing both our life (v25) and possessions (v23-24 & 26) as not ours - but as on loan from God - and taking a posture toward them accordingly. Our passage closes with him saying, “your Father knows that you need food and drink (so) seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” “Follow me - my ways and where I lead - and I will take care of you.”

Whenever we feel challenged by God's word, Jesus prefers to help us identify (the reality of) what we really want so He can address that desire with His good news.

However, just because this is the Good News - this is a truly awesome promise from God - just because we hear it and can perhaps even compare it to bad news / lies we've been believing, doesn't mean we'll necessarily be able to believe it. My encouragement is just to be honest with God about wherever we are.

We may say, “I hear, God, that you want me to learn to trust You as my provider, but this greed thing is pretty deep.”

- For example, I know for myself that growing up a rich kid, gifts and money was one of the primary ways love was communicated to me, and buying or receiving material things was one way I learned to make myself feel good and make up for other deficits. And me & God have been working on that, but I'm still on that journey.
- Others of us may have trauma or fears around ever not having enough that we come by really honestly.

The answer is not to ignore these things (that's the Ivy, caged-dog approach), but to take the courageous step of admitting it to ourselves, but with compassion. Because compassion is what God meets us with. And a further courageous step is telling God, “this is where I struggle to believe your good news, and where I need your healing.” Then leave it up to him to begin to take those quills from our hearts in his time.

Now, we may realize that some desire we have for more money is well-founded and *is* based upon believing the good news. As we said, maybe it is rooted in a real need we have, which we know God cares about or an honest desire to use that money for good, non-ego-driven reasons. If this is the case, then we should take that desire boldly before God's throne and make our request for his provision.

But if we are able to trust this Good News, but realize our desire for more money has been based on bad news or a lie, then the opportunity before us is to repent and believe. And that doesn't sound like fun, but Matt & Ben explain that repentance is really just agreeing with God about reality. So to agree that God is concerned for our needs and can be trusted to provide as we seek to do life with him. And the way that we believe is just by taking an action - a risk - in light of that good news. And we can ask God to show us what that may be: it might be giving generously to some cause, it might be working less, it might be forgiving a debt that is owed to us.

So how is the Lord inviting us to respond to this good news about the wonderful and trustworthy provider God wants to be for us if we'll let Him? Above all, God wants us to respond with the courage of being honest with Him. But let's give an opportunity for this good news to sink a little more deeply into our hearts by singing our response hymn, “*He Careth For You*”. Let's stand together and sing.