



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 8

July 31, 2022

Hay Is for Neighbors **Luke 12:13–21**

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

My mother grew up during the Great Depression. The basic necessities of life were in short supply. Consequently, Mom couldn’t throw anything away. We had more bread wrappers in our house than you could use in a lifetime, but, oh, how angry she was when one day we discarded them all! When commodities become scarce, people tend to hold on to them.

But here’s what I think is an interesting observation: People back then were better at sharing than people are now. Annie Andrasko, a member of my first church, who was nearing a century on this earth, spoke of those days and how everybody was poor, so everyone shared what they had. There were a lot of immigrants in her neighborhood growing up – Slovaks, Russians, Poles. Thankfully, she said, the languages were similar enough that neighbors could borrow a cup of sugar from one another. Contrast that to our day when even the threat of a shortage causes people to buy toilet paper by the cartload.

I think that, among other things, this is a result of our growing up in an age of abundance. Extreme poverty used to be much more common than it is now. When you’re used to going without food, you’re much better at it than those who are used to having their fill. And those who typically can get whatever they want whenever they want it, when suddenly it seems that they can’t, panic sets in and paper goods fly off the shelves.

But I think this panic mode is also indicative of the ever-increasing secularization of our culture. Many people don’t think about God at all. Fifty years ago, more people considered the role of God in their life. They tended to trust Him more. (They had to!) Our society has so successfully excised God from everyday life that when crises come, people don’t know where to turn.



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Even Christians struggle with this, for we're not immune to the secularized culture in which we live. When things don't go as we hoped, our natural response is to panic and worry and fret and to hoard what we cherish despite the glaring need of our neighbor. Yes, even the followers of Jesus forget that He has promised to supply our every need of body and soul. And He has. And He does. Without fail.

Beloved in Christ, what has our Lord Jesus ever withheld from you? Nothing. He emptied Himself, and made Himself nothing, so that you and I might receive from Him all things in heaven and earth. There's not one thing Jesus has that He's not given to you.

The Jews were right when they said that no one can forgive sins but God alone [Lk. 5:21]. But they were wrong in thinking that Jesus was not God. He is God, and He, without question, has the ability to forgive sins, and He does so on account of His death and resurrection. But He's also given His forgiveness to *you*, so much so, that you now have forgiveness to spare, with plenty left over to share with your neighbor.

Jesus said of Himself that He is the resurrection and the life [John 11:25]. Just as He's given you His forgiveness, so has He given to you His resurrection and life. As you heard in today's Epistle, you have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, you also will appear with Him in glory [Col. 3:3-4]. That promise, beloved, is also something you have in abundance and can share with your neighbor.

Forgiveness of sins, resurrection and life, and everything else under the sun that we can possess comes from Jesus. "He owns the cattle on a thousand hills," the old hymn says, "the wealth of every mine." It's all His: my house, your car, your neighbor's hot tub: it all belongs to Jesus. Jesus is rather like the rich man in today's parable, but in this one sense: He has a lot of stuff! But, **UNLIKE** the man in today's Gospel, He's not interested in keeping all that stuff to Himself and locking it away in a barn. Jesus wants you to have His stuff and so He's doled it out to us, each according to our need and ability. I don't know why some people have more stuff than others, or why some have less. What I do know is that all our stuff belongs to Christ and He distributes it as He sees fit. And when we receive it, He wants us to consider it daily bread, manna from heaven, a blessing directly from Him.

Jesus has also given you His perfect righteousness and holiness. He's given you His very body and blood. Jesus has given you His perfect relationship with the Father, His patience and forbearance toward other people, His endurance and strength, His courage in the face of adversity, and even His love for your neighbor. If there's anything else that Jesus has that I've forgotten to mention, He's given that to you, too! Listen to what the Lord says: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). With these Words, God is telling you that it doesn't really matter whether you think of yourself as rich or poor. You're a Christian. You've been baptized into the name of the Triune God, forgiven all your sins and guaranteed a bodily resurrection on the Last Day. That means you're rich. And it means you don't need to care so much about what's in your



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barn. As I mentioned earlier: Our Lord Jesus Christ has withheld nothing from us. He emptied Himself completely, made Himself nothing, so that you and I might receive from Him all things in heaven and earth. There's nothing Jesus has that He's not given to you.

Why would He do this? Because He wants you to relax and stop worrying. He's given you all things so that you'll recognize that "Your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions." Jesus has given you all things in heaven and earth so that you'll have a right view of the things you have stored in your barn.

Please don't get the impression that Jesus is here maligning wealth or forbidding it. He doesn't condemn the fact that the man in the parable was rich. Nor does He say that it's sinful to improve your possessions and income, or that you shouldn't have a savings account or an insurance policy or a new RV, or that it would be wrong to enlarge your house or barn. He simply wants you to rethink your *use* of the possessions He's given you and to have a different end to your story than that of the man in His parable.

How's this for a better ending?:

"The land given you by God produced plentifully, and you thought to yourself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And you said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good! His mercy endures forever. Now let me see . . . which of my neighbors could use some of this stuff?"'"

Father, encourage each of us to use the gifts You've given as You would use them Yourself, that our neighbor would be blessed and Your kingdom spread throughout the world. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen