

*Come Spirit of Christ – open our ears, open our minds, open our hearts; Living God, speak to us. Amen.*

There’s an old saw that the job of a preacher is to comfort the afflicted,  
and afflict the comfortable. And today’s gospel sure invites us to do that.  
I could work up a good stem-winder about greed and a society that has so much  
stuff, we now have storage facilities littering our landscapes to hold it all,  
and \$10,000 kids’ birthday parties, and people who are starving...  
And how would that make you feel? Guilt isn’t what we come to church for.

And since I am most definitely one of the 10 percent if not the 1,  
I’d be afflicted right along with you.  
I rent a house bigger than I need, except when all of you come over...  
I drive a sporty little car, and am in one of the best pension plans going.  
If greed is the crime, I’m indicted along with most of my fellow citizens,  
except those among us who’ve lost just about everything. The fact that we  
share this country with people who have little to nothing is indictment enough.

But Jesus isn’t in the indictment business. He is in the invitation business.  
In telling this parable, he was inviting his listeners – probably many of them  
prosperous – to take a look at where they place their security.  
That’s what he invites us to do this morning: is our wealth the source of  
our security? Are we clutching it tightly, or enjoying it with open hands?  
Do we trust God with our welfare, or are we set on securing it for ourselves?

Oh, let’s not talk about us! Let’s talk about somebody else.  
I had a friend who became a wealthy and successful scientist because he was  
very smart, was raised in a stable home, and went to good schools.  
He was convinced he had earned his own success entirely by himself,  
that he owed no one anything, and could use his resources on himself.  
I don’t think he ever put more than \$5 in the collection plate.  
The natural endowments and advantages he had been given were not some-  
thing he created in himself. God had given him those gifts, and wanted him to  
enjoy them, yes – but also to spend some on nurturing the world around him.  
He’s not a little like the man in Jesus’ parable.  
They are both convinced that they have achieved their own success – though  
in Jesus’ story we read, the ground produced a good crop,” not the man.

They're both committed to saving for themselves, though Jewish and Christian traditions call us to set aside the first portion of our income for God's work. They're both living like this world is all there is, with no reference to God or the life of the spirit. And thus they are both trapped by greed, which Paul defines as "idolatry."

We don't use the word idolatry much. Idolatry is ascribing ultimate worth, worship (the root of worship is "worth-ship"), giving power to something that is created, not Creator. We are all vulnerable to idolatry; it's human nature. We tip from a healthy enjoyment of some good into idolatry when our sense of well-being becomes connected to our experience of that object or person. Idolatry fuels the advertising business – it invites us to invest our faith in a product or process or lifestyle that gives us a sense of being okay – that bids us focus on that thing or person or status we think we need, and we turn our gaze away from the source of all these good gifts, God himself.

It is a tricky balance we are called to live in this world, my friends. God has given us good things – material blessings, work, families, ministries – and God wants us to enjoy them. But not to confuse the gifts with the Giver. As children of God we are meant to love this world and enjoy its abundance, but never for a moment forget that these things are not eternal.

*"Watch out!" Jesus says. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

Our investment, Jesus suggests, should be in the things that are not passing away: chiefly in our relationship with God, in letting God cultivate the soil in our hearts, sowing love that pours out of us in transforming love for the world. Poverty is mentioned more than 2,100 times in the Bible, old and new testaments. God does not want one person to be poor, anywhere. Not one. God's vision for humankind is one where everyone has enough, everyone has access, where all our rankings and distinctions are erased.

We need to ask where our security lies when we think about how to spend our time, when we think about how to use our talents, how to use energy resources, leisure activities, waste disposal; these decisions affect the rest of the planet. As Christians we are called to ask these questions when we contemplate a purchase, whether it's a \$4 latte or a \$25,000 car. Go through your checkbook and credit card bills sometime and evaluate what percentage of your income you spend on entertainment.

And what percentage of your income do you give through your faith community? If we throw \$5 in the plate on a Sunday, and toss \$25 away on lattes and downloads– you do the math. Please. We need to start by doing the math.

Under all these questions lies the fundamental truth for Christians:

everything we have has been given to us by God, on loan to us not to possess and keep, but to love and tend and nurture growth in.

That goes for our time, talent and treasure – and our children, our spouses, our jobs, our bodies, our neighbors, our earth.

We can't do that if we're living like this world is all that matters.

We can only do that if we have eternal perspective, that sees everything as a gift from God, all to be returned to God at the end of our run on this earth, when our truest life begins.

That old self dies at baptism – we need to operate out of our new, eternal selves, which we're already living. Paul says our old self has died with Christ:

*...you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*

That's a vision of radical equality, my friends. Can you imagine a world like that? We get to imagine it, pray it, and help bring it into being.

The best way to walk this tightrope of enjoying God's gifts without clinging to them, is to learn how to seek the things that are above. Practice that.

*If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is... Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Every time we find ourselves captured by something creaturely – “I need that, I want this, I fear that...,” stop, give thanks – and then turn your focus back to the Creator. Trust comes out of gratitude. From gratitude comes generosity. Gratitude and generosity overwhelm greed, every time. They can't occupy the same space.

Take your hand. Clench it up, like you have to hold on to what you have.

Do you have any room to receive? Now, open your hand, let the tension flow out.

Add the other one. Here we are, God, ready to receive Your gifts, to trust You.

If you don't want to live like this (*clenched*), learn to live like this (*open*.)

We'll be amazed at the life that flows into us. *Amen.*

### Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! **Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**"

And he told them this parable: "The **ground** of a certain rich man **produced** a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "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. .' " And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry ' "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?**' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

### Colossians 3:1-11

**If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things-- anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that **you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!**